



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

**‘Reframing Expectations’ - A Contextual  
Approach to Understanding and Addressing Elder  
Abuse in Hong Kong: A Constructivist Inquiry**

By:

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Sheffield  
Faculty of Medicine  
School of Nursing and Midwifery

April 2018

## Abstract

The phenomenon of elder abuse is of growing social concern worldwide and yet remains a relatively under-researched and under-theorised area. This is particularly the case in Hong Kong where elder abuse has only recently received any official recognition and is portrayed in a narrow and sensationalised way in public media. To compound matters Western concepts of elder abuse have been adopted and applied in a largely uncritical manner.

The study described in this thesis explored perceptions of elder abuse amongst communitydwelling older people and health and social care professionals in Hong Kong. The aim was to develop a culturally relevant conception and knowledge of elder abuse to further understanding and to suggest new approaches to addressing elder abuse. Applying the principles of constructivist grounded theory in this study, data were collected using in-depth interviews, vignettes and focus groups. Analyses revealed that participants used a number of subtle and often implicit processes when deciding if a behaviour was abusive. This involved '*evaluating*' the behaviour against a set of '*expectations*' to determine if it was potentially abusive or not. If it was seen as potentially abusive then efforts were made to try and '*explain/excuse*' the behaviour. If it could not be '*excused*' then professionals usually '*exposed*' the abuse whereas older people often chose to '*endure*' the abuse to avoid a potential '*loss of face*'. These differences in perceptions of abuse, and responses to it, between older people and professionals were largely as a result of how older people adhered to traditional Chinese cultural values, especially filial piety.

Based on the results, a ‘*contextual*’ theory of elder abuse was developed. This suggested that if elder abuse is to be better understood then consideration has to be given to the interactions between *six contexts*: the *individual*; the *relational*; the *community*; the *caregiving*; the *cultural* and the *societal*. The thesis concludes with an overview of the actions that need to be taken in each of these contexts if new approaches to addressing elder abuse are to be developed.

***‘Without an awareness of context, the understanding  
of elder abuse will remain incomplete’***

***Roberto and Teaster (2017, p.35)***

## **Acknowledgements**

My sincere appreciation is warmly extended to a number of people whose unfailing support and assistance have meant a lot to me, and this study. Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to my two supervisors, Emeritus Professor Mike Nolan and Dr. Bridget Penhale. They have been a wonderful source of wisdom, inspirations, and knowledge from which I have gratefully learned a great deal. Their guidance and encouragement throughout the study has helped me to overcome numerous challenges whilst avoiding several pitfalls. Their support has been crucial to the completion of this study.

In addition, I offer my deep thanks to those older people and health and social care professionals who kindly gave their time to share their experiences with me. These were invaluable and I can only hope that I have done them justice in reporting my findings. I thank them sincerely for all their invaluable contribution, I learned so much from them.

Lastly, I must express my heartfelt thanks to my family members for their unconditional love, understanding and support. Particular my mother, whose memory has been declining since 2008. I owe her so much and I feel deep sadness that she may not realise what she has enabled me to achieve. Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my husband Jimmy for his wholehearted support and for the stress that he often shouldered on my behalf. This allowed me to engage in this study to the best of my ability.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

---

### 1.1 Introduction

This first chapter seeks to introduce the reader to the thesis by describing the context for the study and the influences that lead me to undertake the research upon which the thesis is based. It begins with an introduction to my background and what motivated me to study the phenomenon of elder abuse within Hong Kong. Subsequently attention is briefly turned to the reasons why elder abuse is considered important and why I believe that a cultural understanding is required if the issue is to be adequately addressed with an older Chinese population in Hong Kong. After '*setting the scene*' in this way the chapter concludes with a description of each chapter that comprises the thesis.

### 1.2 My background, interests and motivations for undertaking the study

I completed my nursing and midwifery training in early 1990s. Subsequently I worked with newborn babies in Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICU) and High Risk Antenatal Units, in Hong Kong and Canada, respectively. Throughout these years, I witnessed parents seeking to provide the best possible care to meet their children's needs. I was often impressed by the extraordinary love and commitment parents demonstrated toward their children. Whenever possible, they would strive to get the best baby-care items, irrespective of prices. Reflecting on my work experiences gained from different countries, I noted that the way Chinese families expressed their care and love seemed somewhat different when compared with the behaviours of western families. For example, it is rare to hear Chinese parents praise their children explicitly, as they fear that something bad/unfortunate might happen if they praise their children openly. Hence,

they would prefer not to make a public display of their love and care. A latent interest in the influence of cultural factors on family relationships emerged from this time.

After undertaking further study, I obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Law in 2004 while maintaining my clinical nursing. This legal training reinforced my belief in the importance of respecting an individual's right to self-determination. This interest played a significant part in guiding my Master's degree dissertation, which investigated the autonomy of older residents living in care homes.

Since 2005, I have held an academic position and as part of my role, I was involved in undertaking other projects exploring the experiences of older people. These projects stimulated my interest in the lives and needs of older people. The more I learned about older people the more I came to appreciate that their rights, dignity and welfare often seem neglected by both professionals and the public, even in a Chinese culture where, in principle at least, older people are revered.

This realization, coupled with my previous legal training, motivated me to undertake research in an area which focused on legal and moral issues in gerontology. After discussing my thoughts with some experienced academic colleagues, I eventually alighted on the issue of elder abuse. I was curious to learn how older people might perceive and react to elder abuse and simultaneously, what were the thoughts of professionals working in health and social care with older people. I wanted to enhance understanding in this area and hopefully contribute to preserving vulnerable older peoples' rights and dignity.

I was further motivated to understand more about elder abuse after I took part in a survey which investigated student nurses' perceptions, knowledge and



awareness of the topic. The survey, which I led in 2009, involved 245 student nurses and the results indicated that they did not feel well trained to identify or handle elder abuse. However, they were not unduly concerned by this, as they felt that this was largely a social worker's role (Lo et al. 2009). This stimulated me to investigate this issue further and to enroll for a PhD study exploring elder abuse in greater detail, as I outline briefly below. An understanding of my motivation in undertaking this work is important because, as will be discussed more fully in later chapters, reflexivity is a key component of the methodology adopted in this study. Having provided a brief overview of my background and interests attention is now turned to the issue that lies at the heart of the work described in this thesis.

### **1.3 The rationale and the context for the study**

The main aim of this study is to understand how Chinese older people and health and social care professionals perceive elder abuse within the Hong Kong context and to tease out what responses or help-seeking behaviours older people might adopt if faced with elder abuse. It is hoped that such knowledge could potentially be used to inform the development of culturally sensitive interventions designed to prevent and address elder abuse. The study therefore seeks not only to add to knowledge, but to provide insights that might potentially help to address an issue of growing social concern. As will be described later in this thesis these aims influenced the methodology that the study adopted.

Hong Kong is a modern society with great diversification among its population along a number of fronts, such as socio-economic status. However, Chinese people make up over 90% of the total population (Census and Statistics

Department, the Hong Kong SAR 2016). Caught between the traditions of Chinese culture and the westernizing influence of more than 130 years of British rule, Hong Kong has experienced spectacular social, economic and political changes over the last century. At the same time, as will be highlighted in the next chapter, it has also been subject to numerous global influences, especially that of population ageing. Consequently, elder abuse undoubtedly exists in Hong Kong but there has been little systematic study of the subject in this setting, especially one that adopts a culturally sensitive perspective and takes as its starting point the views of older people themselves and those health and social care professionals who may have to address the problem.

Stakeholders' perceptions of elder abuse are important because they not only help to develop an adequate knowledge base about elder abuse but also to ultimately shape the total response to the issue (Callahan 1988). Better understanding of elder abuse is needed, not just in Hong Kong but globally. Although research on the topic initially began in the late 1970s, there is still little agreement about a standardized definition (Hudson 1988, Penhale 1999 and see literature Chapter 3). Moreover, previous studies of elder abuse have predominantly focused on the perspectives of white, middle-class professionals (Hudson and Carlson 1998) or on those of older people who have been the victims of abuse. There is very little known about the views of community-dwelling older people regarding what constitutes elder abuse and what their potential help-seeking behaviours might be. This is particularly true among older Chinese people and consequently the voices of older people themselves and the professionals who are working with frail community-dwelling older people, are largely absent from current accounts. As Penhale (in Biggs and

Goergen 2010) points out, more research in the field of elder abuse incorporating the voices of older people is needed.

As will be highlighted in the next chapter older Chinese people may hold different perceptions on what constitutes elder abuse than those typically presented in the largely western literature. As will be seen from the literature review (detailed in Chapter 3), the majority of current studies on elder abuse have been conducted in Western countries, especially the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and other European countries such as the Netherlands and Russia. Very few studies have examined the issue in a Chinese societal context and as far as can be ascertained few have explored the perspectives of Chinese older people themselves. Therefore, by exploring the perceptions of Chinese older people and professionals in Hong Kong, it is hoped that the findings of my study will be useful in shaping the design of culturally sensitive and locally appropriate interventions and training resources. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this study to actually develop and test such materials, it is hoped that the results, and some of the products of the study, for example, the vignettes used (see Chapter 4) will have this potential.

In summary therefore, this study strives to give a voice to community-dwelling older Chinese people living in Hong Kong and the health and social care professionals supporting them in order to understand their perceptions on elder abuse and their potential help-seeking behaviours and preferences. In doing so my initial broad aims for the study were:

1. To explore the perceptions of elder abuse among a sample of Chinese community-dwelling participants aged 65 or above.
2. To identify the potential help-seeking behaviours from a sample of

community-dwelling participants aged 65 or over when faced with potentially abusive situations.

3. To identify the perceptions of elder abuse and current interventions among a sample of professionals (social workers and/or community nurses) working with older people.
4. To generate better understanding of elder abuse in order potentially to inform the development of more culturally sensitive interventions.

The ways in which these aims were informed by the literature and the methodology chosen to address them will be described in subsequent chapters. Having provided a broad context for the study this chapter concludes with an overview of the remainder of the thesis.

#### **1.4 Overview of the thesis**

The thesis has been organized into nine chapters.

Following this Introductory Chapter, **Chapter 2** provides further contextual information about Hong Kong, especially its ageing population and current understandings of elder abuse. In addition, it gives an overview of the major cultural factors that might be important to an appreciation of the ways in which elder abuse is perceived in Hong Kong.

**Chapter 3** provides a consideration of the role that the literature played in shaping the study and includes issues such as the conceptualization (definitions) of elder abuse and existing attempts to understand the genesis of the problem. How the literature was used to identify the sensitising concepts and foreshadowed questions that provided initial direction for the study is described.

**Chapter 4** addresses methodological considerations. It delineates the approach

that was used to explore the perceptions of elder abuse among Chinese older people and health and social care professionals in Hong Kong. It justifies the use of grounded theory and explores its philosophical basis. The chapter briefly discusses how grounded theory emerged, and has evolved, with a particular focus on the approach used in this study, constructivist grounded theory as described by Charmaz (2000, 2005 and 2006). How the study was conducted is described and the methods used to ensure the *'quality'* of the study and ethical considerations are reported, together with a section on reflexivity.

**Chapter 5** reports on the characteristics of the older participants and presents their perceptions on the meaning that elder abuse has for them, its perceived impact and the factors that might influence their help-seeking behaviours and preferences.

**Chapter 6** provides an account of elder abuse from the professional participants' perspectives. The chapter considers how the health care and social service professionals who took part perceived elder abuse and their reports on the way they deal with it.

**Chapter 7** describes the *core category* that emerged from the study that of *'evaluating'*, and the theoretically linked basic social processes of: *explaining/excusing*; *enduring*, and *exposing* elder abuse. These highlight the dynamic nature of the often individual responses to elder abuse. This co-constructed substantive theory captures the phenomenon of elder abuse incorporating the voices of the older people and their professional care providers.

**Chapter 8** considers the *'quality'* of the research comprising the thesis and provides a reflexive account. It goes on to make links between the principal

findings of the study and current understandings of elder abuse. In so doing it proposes a '*contextual*' theory of elder abuse.

**Chapter 9** reflects on the lessons learned from the study and the potential implications for policy, practice, education and wider public, as well as future research for the development of culturally sensitive programmes and interventions intended to address elder abuse.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have attempted to set the scene for my study by considering my motivations for undertaking the work and the broad set of questions that I initially sought to address. It is hoped that this will help the reader to better understand and situate what follows. The next chapter provides further contextual understanding of the current situation in Hong Kong, including the ageing of its population, a brief consideration of current knowledge on elder abuse and why culturally sensitive insights are required.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF ELDER ABUSE IN HONG KONG**

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#### **2.1 Introduction**

According to the information provided by WHO (World Health Organisation 2002, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs357/en/>, accessed August 2015), the number of elder abuse cases world-wide is projected to increase as many countries have rapidly ageing populations whose needs may not be fully understood or met. A similar phenomenon is happening in Hong Kong where the population is ageing rapidly and life expectancy is reaching a record high. At the same time traditional bonds between the generations seem to be eroding and the mass media tend to depict older people as weak, dependent and frail. All these factors have potential influences on our perception of elder abuse. This chapter describes the current understanding of elder abuse in the context of Hong Kong, including the influence of media mass and the recent challenges to traditional Chinese culture regarding older people.

#### **2.2 The ageing of Hong Kong's population**

One of the greatest successes of, but also one the most significant challenges facing, the modern world is that of population ageing. Advances in basic standards of hygiene and sanitation, food production and medicine have seen rapid increases in human longevity over the last century. As a result of rising life expectancy and a decline in fertility rates, the proportion of older people in the worlds' population has been expanding and will continue to grow rapidly. According to the United Nations (2015), the global population of older people (aged 60 or over) is about 901 million. This number is growing fast and it is

projected that by 2030 there will be 1.4 billion people who are aged 60 years or over. This number is expected to reach 2.1 billion by 2050. Such a rapid increase in the number of older people is unprecedented in human history.

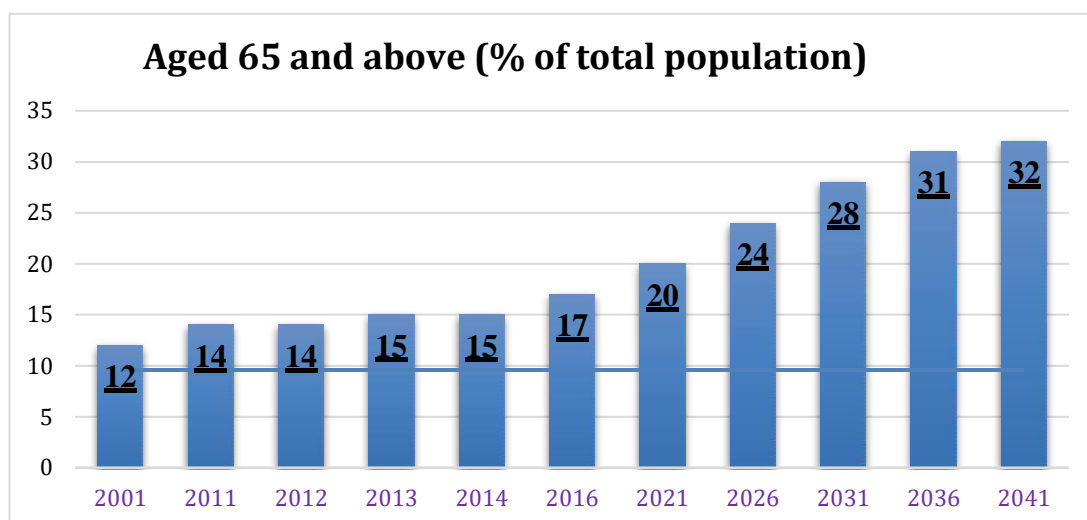
In addition, the phenomenon of rapid ageing is taking place in the context of extensive social, political and economic changes, such as urbanization, industrialization, poverty and an increased proportion of women joining the workforce (United Nations 2011). These changes provide not only the backdrop against which elder abuse occurs but also suggest fertile ground for its potential escalation. Whilst the mistreatment or abuse of older people has undoubtedly occurred throughout history, social recognition of elder abuse and neglect is a far more recent development, as will be highlighted in the next chapter.

Hong Kong, as a modern society, has experienced similar population growth to like countries and as in other parts of the world, Hong Kong's population is also ageing dramatically. Currently Hong Kong has more than 7.3 million people, with the proportion of the population aged 65 and over rising markedly from 12% in 2001 to 17% currently (Research Office, Hong Kong LegCo 2016). Of the 90+ percent of older people living in domestic households, 143,497 (12.7%) live alone (Census and Statistics Department of Hong Kong 2005). In terms of longevity, the life expectancy at birth of the Hong Kong population is amongst the highest in the world. By 2030, the proportion of older people in Hong Kong will be about 25% of the total population, making up almost 2.1 million (Census and Statistics Department of Hong Kong 2011). With such a demographic scenario, specific issues such as elder abuse and other factors that may affect the well-being of older people need to be considered. Figure 2.1, provides a graphic representation of such population changes. This rapid growth in the



number of older people has implications for the services available to support them.

**Figure 2.1: Projected proportion of people aged 65 and above in Hong Kong, 2015- 2064**



Source: Census and Statistic Department SAR, 2015

According to the Social Department of Hong Kong (December 2012), there are three main formal social services commonly used by older people living in Hong Kong. These are residential, financial support and healthcare services.

Different living arrangements may result in different levels of family and social support. The living arrangements of older people in Hong Kong are basically in line with global patterns (Chau and Woo 2008). According to the latest available census data, in 2011 about 91.4% of the Hong Kong population aged 65 and older lived in domestic households (Census and Statistics Department, Thematic Population Survey 2011). Seniors living in domestic households rely more on informal care than those living in institutions. Among those older people living in domestic households, 12.7% of older persons are living alone, 23.6% with spouse only, 29.7% with spouse and children, and 21.4% with children only. The rest, about 12.6% of them, live with friends or unrelated co-habitants arranged by the government. The survey also reported that about 8.6%

of the older persons were living in non-domestic households, such as homes for the aged, hospitals, penal institutions, and so forth.

In terms of financial support, most (about 80%) people aged 65 and over either rely on their own savings or receive financial support from their offspring. The second and third most common sources of income are Old Age Allowance (about 11.6% receive this) and employment earnings (about 10.4% receive this). Among the various sources of income for seniors in Hong Kong, Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA), Old Age Allowance and Disability Allowance fall under the non-contributory social security system provided by the Government. The CSSA provides higher standard rates for seniors. Since February 2013, the monthly CSSA for those aged 65 and above ranged from HK\$2,935 (about £228) to HK\$5,000 (about £389; figures in Sterling correct as of 2013 whereby £1=about HKD12.84) depending on their level of disability and living arrangement (Social Welfare Department of Hong Kong 2013). As of mid-2016, about 57.9% of people aged 65 and above received public financial assistance in the form of either CSSA, Old Age Allowance or Disability Allowance. However, in general, financial assistance from children remains the most common source of income for seniors in Hong Kong.

### **2.3 Current understanding of elder abuse in Hong Kong**

Elder abuse, defined by the World Health Organization (2002) as *“the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-*

*development or deprivation*” (Krug et al. 2002, p.5), is probably a timeless phenomenon but one that has only been officially recognized relatively recently in comparison with other forms of family violence. Some 40 years ago, Baker (1975) and Burston (1977) in Great Britain labeled family members who physically abuse elderly relatives ‘*granny batterers*’. Since then it has been acknowledged that elder abuse is not an uncommon problem worldwide. However, while other manifestations of family violence such as child abuse, have received widespread attention, elder abuse remains a somehow silent and hidden social phenomenon, which has been under-researched and therefore little understood. Given the growing international focus on human rights and gender equality, in particular relating to older people, more attention needs to be given to the issue of elder abuse, especially now that the global population is ageing.

The scope of the problem is substantial as has been reported by a number of previous studies. For example, Sadler et al. (1992) reported that the estimated prevalence of elder abuse in Australia was 4.6-5.4%; the rate was about 6.7% in Finland (Kivela et al. 1992); 5.6% was reported in the Netherlands (Comijs et al. 1998); 10% in the United States of America (Lachs and Pillemer 2015); 3.5% in Canada (Podnieks 2001); 2.6% in the United Kingdom (O’Keeffe et al. 2007); 2.2% in Ireland (Naughton et al. 2010); 19% in Japan (Mizuho 2006); and 21.4% in Hong Kong (Yan and Tang 2001). While these figures may reflect only the ‘*tip of iceberg*’ (Anetzberger 1987, National Centre on Elder Abuse 1998), it is noticeable that the prevalence of elder abuse varies greatly from region to region, country to country and in fact, from culture to culture, appearing to be much higher in the Far East. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the wide variation in prevalence rates could be due to differences in the types of abuse

recorded, prevalence periods, the age range covered or methodology of the study. Hence, it is difficult to generalize the extent of the problem based on these figures.

Despite current figures suggesting that elder abuse is potentially far more prevalent in Hong Kong than elsewhere, so far the problem has failed to receive much attention from the public, professionals, academia, or the government. This probably explains why there have so far been only a few studies on the issue of elder abuse in Hong Kong. To the best of my knowledge, the first systematic study on this issue was conducted by Chan in 1985. This study estimated from a sample of 637 that 22.6% of the older persons would be at risk of being abused. A few years later, another study conducted by Leung (1989) on 159 caregivers in Tuen Mun, a suburb of Hong Kong, found that caregivers were more likely to psychologically rather than physically abuse an older person. However, these results should be treated with caution as this study was confined to a single district.

More recently, Chan et al. (2002) conducted a telephone survey on perceptions of what constitutes elder abuse. A total of 1385 respondents from the general public of all ages were asked about a list of 17 potentially abusive behaviours toward older people. It was found that, beating, pushing, slapping, sexual abuse and forcing the older person to be naked were the top five situations that respondents defined as elder abuse. On the other hand, behaviours such as leaving the older person at home, not providing adequate daily living support, using the older person's money without consent, yelling at them loudly, and restricting their freedom of activity were the five behaviours least likely to be considered abusive and/or to be reported.

These few studies aside, to date there has been very limited centralized and systematic efforts to enhance understanding of the current picture of elder abuse in Hong Kong. However, subsequent to a government-funded study, ‘*Research on the phenomenon of elder abuse in Hong Kong*’ (Hong Kong Christian Services 2002), the government established the Central Information System on Elder Abuse Cases, a central registry of elder abuse cases, in 2004. Table 2.1 summarizes the incidence of reported elder abuse cases from 2005 to 2016.

**Table 2.1: Hong Kong Elder Abuse Statistics**

<b><u>Types of Abuse</u></b>	<b>No. of Cases</b>											
	<u>2016</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2005</u>
Physical abuse	389	359	400	399	257	274	248	344	363	355	327	390
Psychological abuse	69	49	50	73	36	23	24	35	188	141	57	26
Neglect	3	2	1	0	3	2	3	0	1	2	3	3
Financial abuse	102	93	91	70	68	43	18	62	66	76	92	87
Abandonment	2	3	0	2	2	3	1	0	1	0	1	1
Sexual abuse	13	14	12	9	4	2	3	4	6	1	4	1
Multiple abuse	0	0	15	0	5	17	21	20	22	37	38	20
Others (*from 2011)	35	37	0	36	33	7	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>613</b>	<b>557</b>	<b>569</b>	<b>589</b>	<b>408</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>647</b>	<b>612</b>	<b>522</b>	<b>528</b>

Source: Social Welfare Department HKSAR, 2016

Interpreting these statistics is however difficult when compared to data from other studies. For example, Yan and Tang (2001) found that the prevalence of elder abuse in Hong Kong was 21.4%. Therefore, while these data should be interpreted with caution, these figures suggest that the cases formally reported may indeed reflect the “*tip of the iceberg*” as described by Anetzberger (2005). For example, extrapolating Yan and Tang’s (2001) proportions to the total older

population of Hong Kong would give a figure of over 240,000 elder abuse cases in 2011, and yet only 368 cases were reported. Clearly, neither set of figures is likely to be 100% accurate, but they do demonstrate the significant potential for under-reporting of elder abuse in Hong Kong. This situation is similar to that occurring elsewhere such as the U.K. and New York City (Action on Elder Abuse 2016, New York City Department for the Aging 2016) respectively.

This probably highlights the hidden nature of the problem in Hong Kong. For whilst elder abuse clearly exists, it is seldom reported in the mass media, and there are few publicly available discussions on the topic. For example, a search conducted by me in January 2013 of books on elder abuse identified 267 in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University Library but only 14 in the Hong Kong Public Library. One may wonder why elder abuse is so seriously under-reported and under-discussed in Hong Kong. The reasons are likely to be multifaceted, and include factors such as a lack of a uniform definition for different kinds of abuse, and/or different research methods being used, and/or lack of awareness and understanding about what abuse is. Whatever the reason, the influence of traditional Chinese cultural values is likely to be key to any understanding of elder abuse in Hong Kong (see later for a fuller discussion).

In order to gain a better idea about the situation of elder abuse in Hong Kong, it seems that two particular areas need to be explored: 1) how elder abuse has been portrayed and discussed in the local mass media; and 2) the potential influence of cultural factors.

## **2.4 Media and cultural influences on perceptions of elder abuse**

### ***Mass media's representation of elder abuse***

Elder abuse in Hong Kong, as portrayed in the mass media, tends to adopt a sensationalist approach. Very often, mass media accounts use vivid photos (see exemplar in Figure 2.2) and dramatic story-lines to report elder abuse cases.

**Figure 2.2: A news clip photo from the mass media capturing a suspected case of elder abuse in a local care-home in Hong Kong (Oriental Daily 20131126)**



However reporting is limited and a consideration of articles in popular Hong Kong newspapers over the last 10 years led me to three general conclusions. Firstly, if one were to make judgements based on newspaper reports there appear to be few cases of elder abuse in Hong Kong. Secondly, those cases that are reported in the press are sensationalised, for example, a recent headline read *'Elderly nursing home residents 'stripped and exposed' in the open before being bathed'* (Ming Pao 2015). Thirdly, if one relied on media accounts, it seems that nearly all cases of elder abuse happen in institutions. This seems to be most unlikely but as the majority of people gain their impressions of elder abuse from such sources, the potential to hold a misleading perception of both the extent and nature of abuse is considerable.

The second area that merits attention is the possible influence of cultural factors on perceptions of what constitutes abuse. As is highlighted below the limited

research available on public perceptions of abuse suggests that these do not necessarily accord with the ‘official’ line, which some see as being overly influenced by Western definitions. For whilst Hong Kong is a modern society that has been subject to several Western influences for over a century, more than 90% of the Hong Kong population is Chinese (Census and Statistics Department 2010) and therefore traditional cultural values are likely to exert a significant influence on the way that phenomena such as elder abuse are perceived. This is considered below.

### ***Cultural influences on Chinese people’s understanding of elder abuse***

Culture influences an individual’s perception of many things and the limited available work suggests that this is as true of elder abuse as it is of other issues. In one of the very few studies available on public perceptions of elder abuse in Hong Kong, Chan et al. (2008) conducted a telephone survey of 885 adults from the community and found that perceptions and reporting of abuse (of any form) varied by who the victim was and how the victim was abused. In particular, it seems that peoples’ perceptions of abuse do not reflect the official definitions used, with the latter being heavily influenced by Western concepts imported into Hong Kong, which do not necessarily reflect the perceptions of Chinese people. Traditional Chinese culture place a heavy emphasis on filial piety and mutual support among kinship groups and whilst it has been argued that recently the Western ideal of individualism has influenced many young people who prioritize self-development over family obligations and responsibilities (Chong and Kwan 2001), this will not generally be the case for older individuals. It is therefore very important to consider the potential role of cultural factors in the way that older people are perceived, which may in turn influence the way that



abuse is construed. Such influences are considered further below.

### ***Kinship relationships and intra-familial support networks in the Chinese context***

Within Chinese culture relationships between and among family members are defined primarily by roles and functions within the family system (Yang 1992). In the Chinese context, relationship [*guanxi* 關係] refers to social ties or connections among people. Chi et al. (2001) explain that kinship [Qīnshǔ guānxì] is the strongest kind of intra-familial relationship for Chinese individuals, followed by extended families and then extra-familial relations such as neighbours, friends, and co-workers. They further explain that *guanxi* regulates the behaviours expected of people belonging to a particular network. An individual's social interaction, level of self-disclosure, and willingness to seek or provide help are some of the factors that contribute to the strength of *guanxi*. Additionally, *Guanxi* also provides individuals with a sense of belonging and security and as such, it represents a framework by which an individual constructs their social identity through a process of social comparison and self-evaluation (Pang 2003). Clearly, its potential influence is considerable. Another concept more specifically related to older people is that of filial piety.

### ***Filial piety – the root of Chinese family expectations***

Over the centuries, Chinese culture has been heavily influenced by the Confucian tradition of filial piety and the five cardinal relationships or *Wu Lun* (Braun et al. 1998). These ethical and moral principles provide clear guidelines regarding the power, roles, obligations and responsibilities of each family member (Dong et al. 2011). The core of filial piety puts great emphasis on the relationships between parents and their children. Accordingly, parents are

expected to take good care of their children when they are young, and adult offspring are expected to be responsible for their parents' well-being as they grow old. In turn, older parents are supposed to 'obey' their adult offspring (Chao 1983). This system of interdependence among family members has been working in Chinese societies for thousands of years.

The concept of filial piety is taken from the Chinese expression – *Xiao Tao* [孝道], which refers to a complex series of duties of children to their parents. It is commonly accepted that in Chinese societies, families play a major role in providing older people with informal care and support. The Confucian value system upholds the view that caring for older people is a family responsibility. It is well documented that Chinese people, under the great influence of their cultural values and tradition, have inherited certain personality characteristics and value orientations that are unique (Kwan et al. 2003, Phillips 2000). For instance, individualism is the prevailing ideology in Western societies, and a family is perceived as a collection of related individuals. Studies have found that there is a hierarchy of family caregiving in Western cultures based on a caregiver's kinship relationship to an elderly relative (Nolan et al. 1996, Wright 1998). By contrast, Chinese culture traditionally assumes that the family is the basic unit of society. This influences how Chinese people think and feel about their families and the expectations they have of their lives as they grow older. However, despite existing for thousands of years such values are being increasingly threatened.

### ***Recent threats to traditional values: challenges of an ageing population in Hong Kong***

Filial piety stresses obedience to one's parents. Sons and daughters are obliged to provide the best possible care to ageing parents in return for the care they received as dependent children. Theoretically, this traditional value should serve

to protect older people from elder abuse. But recent decades have witnessed the decline of such traditional values among younger people in Hong Kong (Chow 2004). Changes brought about by industrialization, modernization, globalization and other social structural changes appear to be affecting the long-standing Chinese traditions of filial piety; and some time ago, Ting (2009) observed that the strength of this traditional Chinese value has been weakening in the face of demographic, economic and political transformations.

There is now growing evidence that filial piety is on the decline and that societal attitudes towards older people have also changed. A more recent study conducted in Hong Kong found that compared to older people, college students demonstrated a significantly lower level of filial piety (Yan and Tang 2002). Contradicting the old Chinese saying, *'having an elderly person in the family is like having a treasure,'* the study also found that the younger generation tended to view the past experiences of older people as boring and perceived older people as having nothing to do and always meddling in other peoples' affairs. With the decline of filial piety and exposure to a diversity of Western values, such as individualism and personal freedom, the younger generation in contemporary Chinese society may prefer to pursue individual goals rather than fulfilling their traditional family obligations, as expected.

Population trends also appear to be changing family membership. According to census data, the proportion of nuclear families has been increasing (Tang et al. 2000) and more young Chinese couples in Hong Kong are choosing to cohabit or delay their marriage, remain childless and prefer not to live with their parents. Furthermore, daughters and daughters-in-law, who were customarily assigned

the role of carers, are now more likely to be active in the workforce (Chen 2001). All in all, such developments mean that there are increasing numbers of older persons who either live alone or live with their adult children but with no one to care for them.

Recently, unprecedented changes in family structures are now becoming apparent, with children now being most likely to have four grandparents, two parents, and no siblings or offspring in their family in contrast to previous extended families. It is easier to be filial when families are large and life expectancy short. Such demographic changes, together with the new values being adopted by younger adults in Hong Kong, will undoubtedly pose significant challenges to the traditional Chinese value of filial piety.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter has been to provide a more detailed context and rationale for the study described in this thesis. It has highlighted the population ageing of Hong Kong and the relative lack of attention so far given to the issue of elder abuse. It has been suggested that current approaches to elder abuse in Hong Kong have perhaps been subject to too much influence from Western definitions and concepts, whilst at the same time the subject is not one that is given much public consideration. The limited data available indicate that the prevalence of abuse in Hong Kong **may** be much higher than in Western countries but at the same time, the number of cases officially recorded are very low. Currently traditional Chinese cultural values are being challenged by attitudinal and demographic changes. All these factors highlight the need to explore the issue of elder abuse further, especially from a cultural perspective. As noted in the introduction, that is the main aim of my study. The next chapter considers the

role that the literature played in both shaping the broad questions that the study sought to address and how it influenced the methodology chosen to answer them.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE ROLE OF THE LITERATURE AND OTHER FORMS OF 'KNOWLEDGE'

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#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the role that existing understanding of elder abuse played in this thesis with a particular emphasis on the influence that the literature exerted on the initial direction of the study and the foreshadowed questions that it sought to address. As will be described more fully in Chapter 4, I chose to adopt a constructivist grounded theory methodology, informed by the writings of Rodwell (1998) and Charmaz (2000, 2003 and 2006), to pursue these initial aims. However, this decision did raise some questions about the role of the literature, which is contested in qualitative studies generally and grounded theory in particular. Rodwell (1998) contends that in constructivist work generally, the primary role of the literature at the start of a study is to identify the '*sensitising concepts*' and subsequent '*foreshadowed questions*' that provide the initial direction that the study follows. Such a stance was reinforced by Charmaz (2000, 2006). This issue is discussed in more detail shortly.

However, it is not just the influence of the literature that needs to be made explicit but also the other forms of '*knowledge*' that might in some way have shaped the study. Given that I chose to adopt a constructivist approach, in which the contribution of the participants themselves (including the researcher) is both recognised and encouraged (see later for fuller discussion), the influence of other forms of knowledge (for example from mass media and other publicly available sources) also need to be accounted for. As I explained in the previous chapter, as part of sensitising myself to the subject of elder abuse in Hong Kong,

I undertook a search of public libraries and the most popular newspaper (over a 10-year period) in Hong Kong and identified that these sources gave limited attention to elder abuse. Moreover, when abuse was featured, the coverage was usually of a sensational nature and confined almost exclusively to abuse in institutional settings. It seems that abuse within family/community settings does not exist as far as popular sources are concerned. This further reinforced in my mind the need for a study such as the one undertaken in this thesis.

The other important source of prior knowledge that needs to be considered are my own initial ideas and preconceptions. Recognising and trying to account for such influences is a key aspect of reflexivity in grounded theory (Gentles et al. 2014, see next chapter for a fuller discussion). I gave an overview of how my experiences motivated me to undertake this study in the introductory chapter and this is something that I will also return to in the discussion.

Having briefly considered the potential influence that other forms of knowledge played in shaping the initial direction of the study the remainder of this chapter focusses on the role of the published literature in identifying the sensitising concepts and subsequent foreshadowed questions that informed the study. Before describing the review process more fully, attention is now turned to the use of literature in grounded theory studies.

### **3.2 Turning to the literature: now or later?**

According to Glaser (1978) one of the originators of grounded theory (see next chapter), a researcher who adopts an inductive approach, such as grounded theory, should have as few preconceived ideas about the research phenomenon as possible in order to minimize the risk that his/her interpretation of the data

may be biased by existing concepts and ideas. For Glaser (1978) the literature should only be consulted after data analysis and the writing of the '*theory*' have been completed in order to ensure that it is '*grounded*' in the data alone. However, such a stance has been increasingly challenged on a number of fronts, both conceptual and pragmatic. For example, Creswell (1998) contends that some preparatory work, including a consideration of the literature is essential, both to '*frame the problem*' and to provide a rationale for the study by ensuring that answers to the questions being posed do not already exist. As he suggests, this not only makes good conceptual sense but it is also necessary to gain ethical approval.

Moreover, as Charmaz (2006) points out, in a constructivist grounded theory study, the researcher's existing knowledge, whether guided by the literature or other sources, needs to be recognised and reflected upon as it **will** influence the analytic process. Charmaz (2006) maintains that to deny that one has any knowledge and/or experience of the substantive field of study, is, in most cases, disingenuous. And importantly, it is contrary to the tenets of a constructivist approach in which the role of both the researcher and participants in actively shaping the emerging theory, is both acknowledged and encouraged.

These latter arguments certainly resonated with my position, especially my desire to give '*voice*' to older community-dwelling people and health and social care staff and this is therefore the stance that I adopted. Having made my position clear, attention is now turned briefly to the status of sensitising concepts and foreshadowed questions.



### 3.3 The status of sensitising concepts and foreshadowed questions

The term '*sensitising*' concept was first used by Blumer (1954) and according to him, a '*sensitising*' concept gives the researcher "*a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances and ... suggests directions along which to look*" (Blumer 1954, p.7). Subsequently '*sensitising*' concepts have been viewed as a '*starting point*' for social researchers when embarking on a qualitative study (Padgett 2004, Rodwell 1998).

As such, they help to draw attention to potentially important features of social interaction and provide guidelines for the direction that a study **may** take in specific settings. Morse and Field (1995) argue that a literature review is an important source of such concepts but that any review should not dictate the direction of a study but rather help the researcher to '*recognize leads without being led*'.

With regard to constructivist grounded theory, Charmaz (2003) suggests that sensitizing concepts are the background ideas that help to inform the overall research problem. She describes them in the following way:

*"Sensitising concepts offer ways of seeing, organizing, and understanding experience; they are embedded in our disciplinary emphases and perspectival proclivities. Although sensitizing concepts may deepen perception, they provide starting points for building analysis, not ending points for evading it. We may use sensitizing concepts only as points of departure from which to study the data."* (p.259)

Taking such a stance, sensitising concepts not only help to shape the early '*foreshadowed*' questions that a study explores but also, should they prove

useful, may be employed during the analysis process. As will become clear, one of the main sensitising concepts that both gave direction to my study and influenced subsequent analysis was the role played by cultural factors in shaping perceptions of, and reactions, to elder abuse.

For Rodwell (1998), '*foreshadowed*' questions are the ones that precede any data collection. However, unlike questions in, for example, a questionnaire, it is fully anticipated that foreshadowed questions will evolve and may change as data collection and analysis proceed. This, as will be elaborated on in the next chapter, is a central feature of constant comparative analysis.

The sensitizing concepts, and foreshadowed questions derived from them, that were used in this study were a product of my own ideas and preconceptions, my brief analysis of publically available knowledge and portrayals of elder abuse and my consideration of the published literature. The remainder of this chapter focusses on the latter.

### **3.4 Overall purpose of the literature review**

As explained above the primary aim of the literature review was, in combination with other forms of '*knowledge*', to identify potential sensitising concepts to inform the study and to use these concepts to help shape the initial foreshadowed questions. The key objectives of the review were therefore to:

- explore the literature pertaining to older peoples' and professionals' perceptions, knowledge and understanding of elder abuse
- identify from the literature types of elder abuse and how they are perceived by the above groups
- identify from the literature what might influence peoples' perceptions

of elder abuse

- consider what the literature says about how the above groups may respond to elder abuse.

### **3.5 Search strategies and selection criteria**

Because the literature on elder abuse was likely to span a wide range of sources the following databases were searched: CINAHL (the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature), MEDLINE via OvidSP, PsycINFO, and EBSCOHOST. The search was conducted using combinations of the following keywords: ‘*elder-abuse*’, ‘*elder-mistreatment*’, ‘*elder-exploitation*’, ‘*elder-neglect*’; AND ‘*perception*’, ‘*perceive\**’, ‘*attitude*’, ‘*belief*’, ‘*views*’, ‘*experience*’, ‘*responses*’; AND ‘*culture*’, ‘*influence*’. I also used ‘Google’ to look for government documents, newspapers, and so forth.

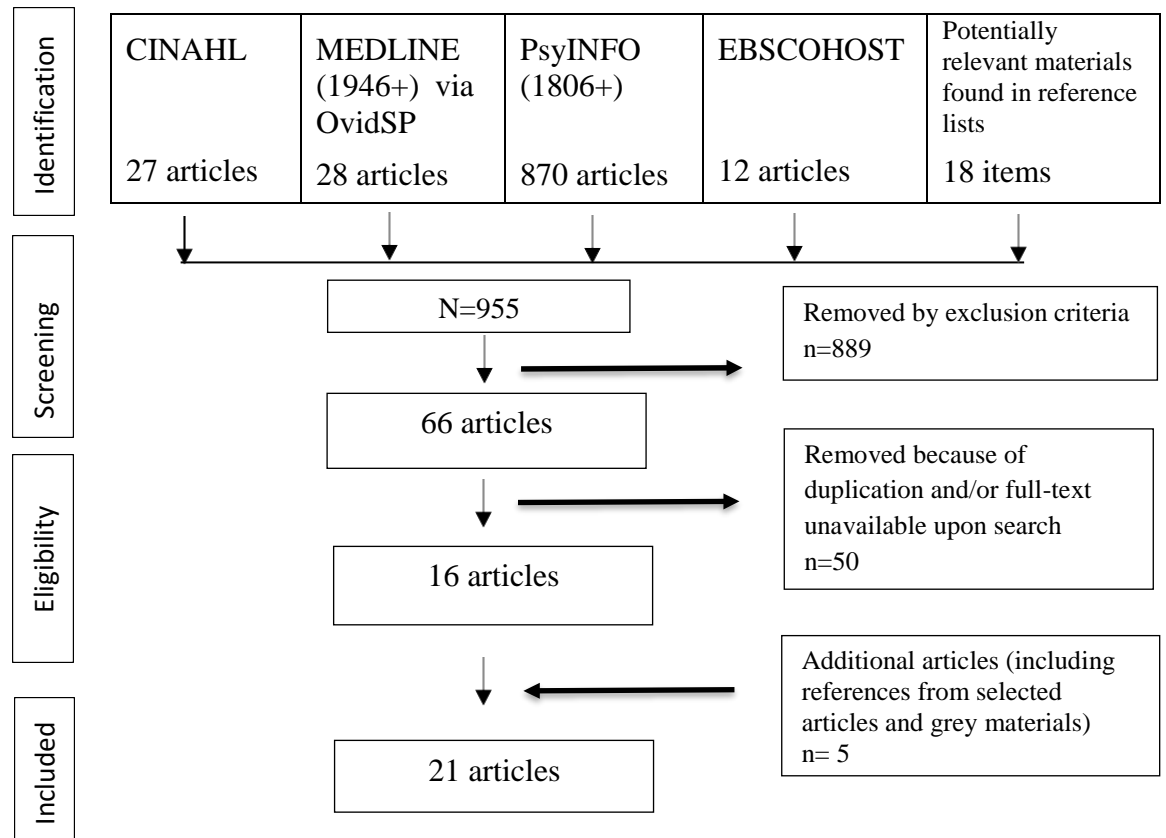
The search period for the initial literature review was confined to articles published between January 1997 and January 2011. This timeframe was set because I wished to consult the most recent studies up to the point when I was about to start data collection. The articles consulted allowed me to have a sense of what was known about the subject before I entered the field. Additional articles were identified by examining the reference lists from eligible articles and previous systemic reviews.

Initially, a total of 955 items were identified electronically. They included grey literature, such as government documents or reports, newspapers, etc. These came not only from Hong Kong but worldwide sources published in either English or Chinese were included because one of the main aims of the study was to understand what elder abuse means to older community-dwelling Chinese people. Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the literature searched in

this study.

The search was guided by the inclusion and exclusion criteria, so that literature most relevant to the present study was identified.

**Figure 3.1: Literature review strategy**



### Inclusion and exclusion criteria

To select the literature that were most relevant to my review purposes as stated above, I used the following inclusion and exclusion criteria to guide my literature review process:

- I initially included articles that were published between January 1997 and December 2011.
- To be included in this review, the study must have focused on elder abuse and to have addressed topics including: *definitions of elder*

*abuse; older people, healthcare and social professional's attitude of and understanding about what elder abuse; and their responses to it.*

- Both quantitative and qualitative studies were included.

Studies were excluded from the search if they were: about other types of abuse, such as substance abuse, alcohol abuse, child abuse and so forth; conducted in acute healthcare settings; focused mainly on the screening of elder abuse in acute settings; conducted purely to look at the prevalence of elder abuse; focused on respondents who were not among the target groups; and were not published in English / Chinese.

Initially, all the 955 searched articles were screened by their titles and abstracts, using the exclusion criteria. Duplicated articles were removed. Next, I examined the remaining articles for their aims, methods used, and main findings. Twenty-one full-text articles which were deemed eligible based on the above criteria were then obtained and studied in further detail. During this process studies identified from reference lists of screened papers and the grey literature were added. In doing this it became obvious that a number of articles that had been published prior to 1997 had fundamentally influenced the ways in which our understanding of elder abuse had evolved over time. The studies by the following authors were often cited in the later literature and it was clear that these works had shaped later conceptualisations of elder abuse (Aitken and Griffin 1996, Baker 1975, Burston 1977, Bandura 1978, Belsky 1993, Bronfenbrenner 1979, Engles 1977, Homans 1958, Hudson 1991, Johnson 1986, Moon and Williams 1993, Nolan 1993, Pillemer and Wolf 1986, Tatara 1993, Wolf 1986). In order that the contribution of these authors was appropriately acknowledged these references were included as part of the literature as they had

influenced, albeit indirectly, my own study.

### **3.6 Findings from the literature review**

In analysing the selected literature, I looked for themes by reading through the texts and highlighting them using different coloured pens. Guided by Sandelowski's (1995) approach, I began by reading the texts and underlining key terms and sentences. I read all the material at least twice while trying to make sense of their overall 'message'. The nature of the 'message' varied including the perspectives of different groups on the meaning of elder abuse, and conclusions were often broad and sweeping, for example, describing various types or categories of elder abuse, or more focused, for example exploring the meaning of elder abuse for a particular group of people. In order not to exclude any potentially valuable ideas I remained open to all the relevant texts, including grey literature and other sources of knowledge, but sought to identify the most frequently occurring ideas and concepts, which are discussed below.

#### **3.6.1 What are the meanings and types of elder abuse?**

##### *What do we mean by elder abuse?*

My review of elder abuse research unearthed two significant areas of uncertainty: the definition of elder abuse and its classifications into different types. The idea of a separate phenomenon called elder abuse was first suggested by two British physicians, Baker (1975) and Burston (1977). Since then considerable efforts have been made to establish some common ground for agreeing a shared definition of elder abuse. Such a definition should enable –

*the specification of the meaning of an expression relative to a language acceptable to all researchers* (Hudson 1991, Johnson 1986, Utech and Garrett 1992).

I would argue that this stance is problematic. For instance, why should the definition be shaped and shared by only researchers or academics? Would it not be more important, more meaningful and practical to have a definition that is shared also by practitioners, policy makers, older people, and caregivers as well as researchers? As Penhale (2010) has pointed out, the lack of a shared definition of abuse has implications for practice, especially as regards criteria for the identification of abuse and determining when intervention is necessary. Consequently, how elder abuse is defined is important because it provides the foundation for prevention, recognition, reporting, and intervention efforts; with the lack of a consensus on what constitutes elder abuse potentially leading to the mislabeling of cases, inappropriate interventions and outcomes that are unresponsive to older clients' needs (Moon and Williams 1993).

To date, there remains no single globally agreed definition of elder abuse (Penhale 1999); although it is noted that the World Health Organisation (WHO 2002) adopted the UK version (developed by Action on Elder Abuse 1995), which defines elder abuse as being *“a single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older”*. Globally, there remains considerable debate over the definition of elder abuse, with one of the main reasons being that people's perceptions are influenced by their cultural context. Such cultural differences are apparent even within the same country.

For example, Brown (1989) reported that among the Navajo people in the United States, what would appear to an outsider (such as a researcher) to be financial exploitation by family members, was regarded by the tribal older people as their cultural duty and even privilege, to share material belongings with their families. Other Native Indian tribes in the United States viewed elder abuse as a community problem rather than an individual one (Maxwell and Maxwell 1992).

In other studies, Korean older people were observed to be less sensitive to potentially abusive situations than their Caucasian and African counterparts (Moon 2000). The same study also revealed that older Japanese people appeared to tolerate verbal abuse more, compared with other cultural groups. While ‘*disrespect*’ was identified as a culturally specific form of elder abuse in the Chinese community (Tam and Neysmith 2006); disrespect and ageist attitudes toward older people were also perceived as one of the major forms of elder abuse by older participants living in some Western countries, such as Canada, Austria, Brazil and Argentina (WHO/INPEA 2002).

In Hong Kong, elder abuse was defined by the Social Welfare Department in 2003 as ‘*the commission or omission of any act that endangers the welfare or safety of an elder*’. One can argue that the current definition used in Hong Kong is rather vague and despite the vast majority of Hong Kong’s population being Chinese, the official definition of elder abuse is heavily influenced by Western culture / values.

In addition to the overall definition of elder abuse, its classification is also diverse with various taxonomies existing.



### ***Taxonomies of elder abuse and how older people and professionals perceive them***

Another major theme that emerged from a consideration of the elder abuse literature is the proliferation of classification systems intended to capture the varying dimensions of elder abuse. However, the literature reveals that these taxonomies differ. For example, the National Elder Abuse Incidence Study (1998) in the USA categorised elder abuse as including the following seven aspects: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional or psychological abuse, neglect, abandonment, financial or material exploitation, and self-neglect. However, in the United Kingdom, the typology of elder abuse adopted by Action on Elder Abuse (1991) includes five elements: physical abuse, psychological abuse, financial abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. In Australia, elder abuse as defined by the Australian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse in 1999 included physical, sexual, financial, psychological, social abuse and/or neglect. While in Japan, researchers have categorized elder abuse into five major types: psychological abuse, neglect, financial abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse (Tsukada et al. 2001). In addition to the five major types of elder abuse listed by Japan, Hong Kong adds '*abandonment*' to the list. Table 3.1 highlights the similarities and differences amongst different countries in the prevalence and dynamics of elder abuse.

#### (1) Physical abuse:

This category seems to receive most of the attention in the literature, probably because it leaves recognizable marks on victims. Physical abuse includes behaviours ranging from inflicting pain or injury to murder (Wolf 1986). The US National Centre on Elder Abuse (NCEA 1998) specified examples of elder

abuse as acts of violence including striking (with or without an object), hitting, beating, pushing, shoving, shaking, slapping, kicking, pinching, and burning. The inappropriate use of medications and/or physical restraints, force-feeding, and physical punishment of any kind are also examples of physical abuse.

**Table 3.1 Prevalence and dynamics of elder abuse in a selection of countries**

Country Types	Australia	Canada	Hong Kong	Japan	United Kingdom	United States
Prevalence	2-10% [Bagshaw et al. 2009]	7.5% [National survey on the mistreatment of older Canadians 2015]	27.5% [Yan and Tang 2004]	17.9% [Anme et al. 2005]	4% [O’Keeffe et al. 2007]	11.4% [Acierno et al. 2010]
Physical abuse	√	√	√	√	√	√
Psychological / emotional abuse	√	√	√	√	√	√
Financial abuse	√	√	√	√	√	√
Neglect	√	√	√	√	√	√
Sexual abuse	√	√	√	√	√	√
Self-neglect						√
Abandonment			√			√
Social abuse	√					

### (2) Psychological abuse

This type of abuse is not easy to define, measure or detect (Daly and Jogerst 2001). Studies have employed a variety of terms, such as emotional and verbal abuse (Dyer et al. 2000) that have been used interchangeably with psychological abuse. This type of abuse includes various forms of behaviours, such as name-calling, humiliation, isolation, and threat of placement in a nursing home (NCEA 1998, Wolf 1986,).

### (3) Financial abuse

This is defined by the NCEA (1998) as “*the illegal or improper use of an elder’s*

*funds, property, or assets*”. Examples include using an older person’s money without authorization/permission; forging an older person’s bank signature; stealing an older person’s money, property or possessions; coercing or deceiving an older person into signing a document; and improper use of power of attorney (Kemp and Mosqueda 2005).

#### (4) Sexual abuse

Elder sexual abuse is defined as “*non-consensual sexual contact of any kind with an elderly person*” (NCEA 1998). Research investigating elder sexual abuse is scant. Only five previous studies have been located (Burgess et al. 2000, Holt 1993, Ramsey-Klawnsnik 2004, and Teaster et al. 2000). The latter concluded that sexual abuse is perhaps the most understudied and least well- understood form of elder abuse. In my earlier study I found that among 180 first year undergraduate nursing students in a Hong Kong University, none of them identified sexual abuse as a type of elder abuse (Lo et al. 2009).

#### (5) Neglect

Neglect has been defined as the ‘*refusal or failure to fulfil any part of a caregiving person’s obligations or duties to an elder*’ (Aravanis et al. 1992). It has been estimated that approximately 60-70% of all cases of alleged elder abuse fall into the category of neglect (NCEA 1998). Neglect is also suspected to account for the majority of elder abuse cases not reported (Tatara 1993). Neglectful abuse has been described as either active or passive: intentional or unintentional (Hudson 1991). Fulmer et al. (1999) clarified that neglect is different and should be distinct from self-neglect, in that the former occurs in the context of a caregiving relationship with another responsible person, whilst

the latter is the deterioration of well-being from a lack of self-care skills and resources.

As there are different types of abuse, it is likely that there are different causal factors and researchers do not necessarily agree on any one particular model. For instance, elder abuse in England is often primarily framed within the context of medicalization and institutionalization, while in the USA, elder abuse is generally conceptualized as a family problem and placed in the family or domestic violence arena (Aitken and Griffin 1996). Most recently, Penhale (2011), (personal correspondence) points out that, arguably, there is far less medicalization of elder abuse in UK nowadays.

This section has considered the definitions and types of elder abuse and the main conclusion is that the definition and scope of elder abuse clearly varies but that the majority of definitions have been framed within a research rather than a practice framework. This ambiguous situation has led to conceptual uncertainty in terms of both clarity and precision regarding what exactly constitutes elder abuse (Meeks-Sjostrom 2004, Penhale et al. 2000). Such definitional differences across nations have severely limited the ability to draw consistent and meaningful conclusions (Hudson 1988 and 1991, Penhale 2008, Podnieks et al. 1990). The issue of definition is particularly relevant to this study, for one of its chief aims is to explore the definition and meaning of elder abuse among community-dwelling older Chinese people and health professionals living/working in Hong Kong. To assist this, it is necessary to consider existing theoretical frameworks that seek to explain why abuse occurs. The attention is now turned to this aspect.

### **3.6.2 Existing theoretical models used to explain the occurrence of elder abuse**

From the literature, it is clear that most frameworks used to explain elder abuse tend to use relatively '*grand*' theoretical constructions that seek to understand abuse in all contexts. In contrast, the intention of the current study is to develop a substantive '*mid-range*' theory to provide a culturally sensitive and relevant understanding of elder abuse within a specific context (see later for fuller discussion).

In exploring the phenomenon of elder abuse, several theoretical frameworks have been published in an effort to try and '*explain*' why elder abuse occurs. Table 3.2 summarises some of the main ones identified in the literature. Amongst these for instance, Social Exchange Theory, originally developed by Homans (1958) was subsequently adapted by other researchers, such as Dowd (1975) as a framework within which to understand elder abuse in terms of the dependent relationships between an older person and the abuser. Using this approach abuse is seen as a product of their interactions and the responses that occur in family life when '*normal*' expectations are not met.

On a related tack, Carer Stress Theory (Belsky 1993) suggests that a carer might become an abuser when the care burden is too overwhelming, leading to '*burnout*' and abuse. Generally, many researchers have tended to incorporate the causal factors of elder abuse into a wider context examining the quality of relationships (Nolan 1993, Reis and Nahmiash 1998).

Some of the studies on the relationship between caregiver stress and elder abuse suggest that the long-term nature of the relationship between the caregiver and

the care recipient may be one of the most important factors in predicting occurrences of elder abuse (Cooney and Mortimer 1995, Nolan 1996).

**Table 3.2: Key existing theoretical models explaining elder abuse**

Concept / Theory	Approach	Author [year]	Article / Journal
<i>Social Exchange Theory</i>	Interpersonal approach	Homans (1958)	Social Behaviour: Its Elementary Forms, New York: Harcourt Brace.
	Summarizes theories and practice for Training	Decalmer and Glendenning (eds.). (1997)	The Mistreatment of Elderly People. London: Sage Publications
	Interpersonal approach to identify relationship Types	Walker and Allen (1991)	Relationships Between Caregiving Daughters and Their Elderly Mothers. <i>Gerontologist</i> , 31 (3) (1991): 389–396.
<i>Social Learning Theory</i>	An analysis of aggressiveness progression	Bandura (1973, 1978)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aggression: a social learning theory of aggression. Oxford England: Prentice-Hall.</li> <li>Social learning theory of aggression. <i>Journal of Communication</i>, 28(3), 12-29.</li> </ul>
<i>Caregiver Stress Theory</i>	Developmental context focuses on the parenting and parental-child interactional processes	Belsky (1993)	Etiology of Child Maltreatment: A Developmental Ecological Analysis. <i>Psychological Bulletin</i> , 114 (3), 413–434.
	Interpersonal approach: the burdened caregivers and the dependent elderlies	Steinmetz (2005)	Elder Abuse Is Caused by the Perception of Stress Associated with Providing Care. In <i>Current Controversies on Family Violence</i> , eds., D.R. Loseke, R.J. Gelles, and M.M. Cavanaugh, Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, pp.191–206.
	Examines the multifaceted nature of elder abuse cases	Wolf (2000)	The Nature and Scope of Elder Abuse. <i>Generations</i> , 24, pp. 6–11.
<i>Dyadic Discord Theory</i>	A causal model of courtship aggression	Riggs and O’Leary (1989)	A Theoretical Model of Courtship Aggression, in <i>Violence in Dating Relationships: Emerging Social Issues</i> (Eds.). M.A. Pirog-Good and J.E. Stets, New York: Praeger.
<i>Power and Control Theory</i>	Sociocultural contextual approach	Yllo and Bogard (1998)	In <i>Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse</i> , Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage.
	Feminist approach	Yllo, K.A. (2005)	Through a Feminist Lens. In <i>Current Controversies on Family Violence</i> , (Eds.). D.L. Loseke, R.J. Gelles, and M.M. Cavanaugh, Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, pp.19–34.
<i>Sociocultural context</i>		Engles, G. (1977)	Inspired by the author and developed by panel to review risk and prevalence of elder abuse and neglect, USA.
<i>Ecological Theory</i>	Multi-systemic approach	Bronfenbrenner (1979)	The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design, Boston: Harvard University Press.
<i>Conflict in the family</i>	Conflictual family contextual approach	Pillemer and Wolf (1986)	Elder abuse: conflict in the family, 1986. Dover Mass: Auburn House.
<i>Construction of abuse</i>	Foucauldian approach	Biggs and Powell (1999)	Surveillance and elder abuse: the rationalities and technologies of community care. <i>Journal of Contemporary Health</i> , 9, pp.10-18.
<i>Attachment Theory</i>	Relational conflict in later life	Shemmings (2000)	Adult attachment theory and its contribution to an understanding of conflict and abuse in later life relationships. <i>Journal of Adult Protection</i> , 2(3), 40-49.
Applied theory from research on crime	Integrated perspectives	Payne (2005)	Crime and elder abuse: an integrated perspective. Springfield: Charles C Thomas.

Upon examining the above '*theories*' it seems clear that the majority focus mostly on the risk factors for elder abuse within an overarching framework. For instance, as with Social Exchange theory, Social Learning Theory, which was initially developed by Bandura (1978) to explain the way children observe the surrounding people's behaviours and imitate those behaviours. The Theory was applied to elder abuse suggesting that it was actually a learned behaviour influenced by activities related to one's upbringing and development (Korbin et al. 1995).

The Ecological model (Bronfenbrenner 1979) postulated that to better understand human development, it is important to take into account not only the genetic aspects of the person, his/her physical and social environment as well as interactions among the environment and other broader political and economic conditions. The framework applied in explaining elder abuse provided that abuse is a complex phenomenon, which involves the interplay of multiple factors including individual and family relationships, community and societal environments (Schiamberg and Gans 1999). However, as with definitions of elder abuse, no one theory has received universal support and it is questionable whether an overarching approach will be sufficiently sensitive to account for all abusive situations. Rather, as this study argues, there is a need to take far more account of local and cultural issues.

Furthermore, none of the taxonomies above has sought to explain elder abuse by explicitly incorporating the voices of both older people and frontline professionals suggesting the need for further work in this area. Moreover, studies on elder abuse have been conducted mainly in English-speaking

societies dominated by Western cultures. There is little evidence as to whether or not such findings, including theoretical perspectives, apply to Chinese families. Some of the literature relating to the views of older people is considered below.

### **3.6.3 Wider perspectives on the meaning of elder abuse**

As one of the main aims of this study is to explore the meaning of elder abuse from the perspectives of older people as well as health and social care professionals, it is important to consider the existing literature in this area. Since the late 1980s studies have started to explore how different people perceive or define elder abuse (Anetzberger et al. 1998, Brown 1989, Moon and Benton 2000). Four main groups of people have been included in such studies, and these are professionals, family caregivers, the general public and older people. For the purpose of this study, the focus will be on the perspectives of older people and health and care professionals working with them.

Given the importance of family carers in understanding elder abuse, consideration was given to including them in the study. However, as one of the main aims of the research was to understand elder abuse from the perspectives of **community-dwelling** older people, many of whom would not have a family carer, it was decided to use the limited time available within a PhD study to concentrate on the views of older people and professionals. Even at an early juncture, this must be recognised as a potential limitation of the study and this will be considered more fully in the discussion.

With respect to research on elder abuse involving older people, a number of



studies have been undertaken in Western societies. For example, Hempton et al. (2011) used the Scenario Questionnaire to collect perceptions of elder abuse among older people in Australia. The study recruited 120 health professionals, 361 older people and 89 carers and found that there was limited agreement between these three groups on the definition of elder abuse. The study further pointed out that there was a general lack of recognition as to the forms / types of elder abuse. In Ireland, Naughton et al. (2010) used face-to-face interviews to study/survey 2021 community-dwelling older peoples' understanding of the term elder abuse and pointed out that despite various ongoing public campaigns, there was still a significant proportion of older people who remained unaware of, or knew very little about, elder abuse (Naughton et al. 2014).

It appears that a similar situation exists in Far Eastern populations, with a low level of awareness of elder abuse among older people being reported in a Japanese study (Tsukada et al. 2001), in which, a sample of more than 4000 Japanese older people took part. It was found that nearly 50% did not know what elder abuse was.

The literature also suggests that culture plays an important role in shaping perceptions of elder abuse. In a study that compared three-groups of women's perceptions of elder abuse, Moon and Williams (1993) ascertained that Korean women were significantly less sensitive to potentially abusive situations, compared to Caucasian and African American women. Doe et al. (2009) suggested that Asian countries or regions were not as likely to acknowledge elder abuse because of the belief that traditional values of filial piety should prevent elder abuse from happening. Moreover, Walsh (2010) asserted that

actions or behaviours that might be considered acceptable in one cultural context may be deemed as abusive in another.

A study of community-dwelling older Taiwanese people found that amongst all types of elder abuse, psychological abuse was recognised as the most common form (Wang 2006). Dong et al. (2007) noted that in China, older people who did not receive housing and food from relatives were deemed to be neglected and hence, neglect (by caregiver) was the most common form of elder abuse reported.

Whilst in Hong Kong, similar to mainland China, where the traditional practice of filial piety was considered as a social norm, Yan and Tang (2004) found that the majority of abuse reported was verbal (20.8%) with physical abuse (2.0%) being far lower. It is interesting to compare this finding with a study conducted in the Canadian Chinese community, which discovered that '*disrespect*' was perceived as the key form of elder abuse as this was explicitly counter to traditional ideals of filial piety (Tam and Neysmith 2006). With shared cultural values, it is no surprise that the literature findings reveal that older Chinese people from different parts of the world are generally more sensitive to verbal/psychological abuse than other forms.

#### **3.6.4 Perceptions of help-seeking behaviours**

While a better understanding of perceptions of elder abuse amongst older people is important, knowing how they are likely to react to and potentially seek help in the face of an abusive situation is also key if better services are to be developed. In this context, '*help-seeking behaviour*' is taken to mean disclosing

abuse to a third party in order to obtain assistance or help. The National Center on Elder Abuse (1998) commented that the available evidence indicated that older people from different cultural groups have varying levels of tolerance toward different types of abuse.

In a cross-cultural comparison of 30 African Americans, 30 Caucasian Americans, and 30 Korean elderly immigrants to the USA, Moon and Williams (1993) asked their respondents to rate whether and how much 13 scenarios involved abuse. On average, Korean American seniors were less sensitive to potentially abusive situations than the other two groups. It was also found that when deciding whether a given situation was abusive or not, the older people carefully considered three main factors: the intention of the person involved, circumstantial factors including the availability of alternative actions, and the nature of the possibly abusive act. The majority of the African American seniors (73%) were more sensitive in perceiving situations as potentially abusive, followed by the Caucasian group (67%), and the Korean group (50%). This finding is important and relevant to the present study because it suggests that older people's identification of elder abuse actually influences their perception of whether and from where they might seek help in a given situation.

Beaulaurier et al. (2008) conducted focus groups with 134 women aged 45 to 85 in the US to explore barriers to their help-seeking when they experienced intimate partner violence. The study identified both external and internal factors that might impair victims' help-seeking intentions. Internal barriers included abusers' behaviours, protecting the family, self-blaming, powerlessness, hopelessness and wishing to keep things secret. External barriers included

family responses, clergy responses, justice system responses and community responsiveness.

Lee and Eaton (2009) found that amongst a sample of 124 elderly Korean immigrants in the United States, of whom 92% had been abused financially, only 64% intended to seek help. The study suggested that this was due to cultural influences and revealed that the main reasons for older Koreans not seeking help included feelings of shame and believing it to be a family problem that did not need outside help.

Failure to recognise a behaviour as abusive will significantly reduce help seeking (Bonnie and Wallace 2003); and even if abuse is recognised, older victims may decide not to seek help due to a sense of loyalty to the abuser (usually a family member), fear of consequences or having to depend on the abuser for daily care (Walsh et al. 2010). Operating on the principle that increasing awareness of elder abuse can alter subsequent behaviours, the World Health Organisation (2011) launched an international programme to empower older people with knowledge and information about sources of help so that they could help to protect themselves from elder abuse. The effect is yet to be evaluated.

Clearly, a wide variety of factors may influence an older person's likelihood of either reporting or seeking help with elder abuse, and a better understanding within Hong Kong is required. Attention is now turned to the perspectives of professionals.

### 3.6.5 Professionals' perspectives of elder abuse

Whilst much of the literature has been dominated by the views of professionals and researchers as early as 1991, Hudson conducted a three-round Delphi survey with a national panel of elder mistreatment experts (including researchers, clinicians, educators, and policy-makers). Out of 90 potential subjects, 63 completed all three rounds. The study identified a five-level taxonomy of elder abuse and established inductively a theoretical definition of elder abuse. The panel of experts perceived elder abuse as a destructive behaviour, which was directed towards an older adult, occurring within the context of a trusting relationship to produce harmful physical, psychological and social effects and/or violation of human rights and decreased quality of life for the older adult.

Somewhat later, Hudson and Carlson (1998) found that although there was agreement between the public and elder abuse experts on the meaning of elder abuse, there were also some areas where views diverged. For instance, compared with their public counterparts, '*experts*' perceived chemical restraint as a more severe form of abuse, but felt that verbal devaluing of an older people was unacceptable but not abusive.

Even within professional groups, there is disagreement about what constitutes elder abuse. For example, a group of Swedish district nurses saw elder abuse as a negative execution of power over a weaker party within the family (Saveman et al. 1996). On the other hand, the views of trainee nurses in Hong Kong appeared to vary by seniority with a study of 278 undergraduate nursing students (Lo et al. 2009) revealing that while the most junior nursing students (year 1) did not identify sexual abuse as a form of elder abuse, the majority of the senior

nursing students (year 3 of a 4-year degree programme) did not regard financial exploitation of the older people as elder abuse. Another study revealed that among a group of nurses and care assistants who worked in long-term care settings, there was a high level of uncertainty about what constituted elder abuse (Daly and Coffey 2010).

Some researchers claimed that physicians, despite being in an advantageous position to intervene, lagged behind other professionals in reporting abuse (O'Brien 2010). This could be due to the fact that physicians tend to view all types of elder abuse as less severe when compared to other groups of people (Helmes 2007). In a cross-sectional self-report questionnaire study, Thompson-McCormick et al. (2009) also found that 202 medical students performed well in many diagnostic tests but were not good at recognizing the signs and symptoms of elder abuse.

A survey by McCreadie and her colleagues (2000) used mailed questionnaires to investigate general practitioners' (GPs) recognition of elder abuse. A total of 291 GPs in Birmingham, UK responded. The analysis indicated that there was general lack of knowledge of risk situations for elder abuse, and lack of training in detecting it, among the GPs who participated.

In the United States, Yaffe et al. (2009) found that barriers to doctors' detection of elder abuse included 1) fear of offending their patients, 2) the belief that detection would not lead to a solution, 3) a failure to distinguish between signs of ageing and abuse. In general, the literature seems to suggest that doctors need to be better trained if they are to address the problem of elder abuse adequately.

Taking a wider perspective, Erlingsson et al. (2006) used qualitative focus groups to explore perceptions of elder abuse among professionals and volunteers in Sweden. The participants included older persons, victims, police officers, the general public and healthcare professionals. The findings indicated that: 1) all abusive actions, even those grounded in good intentions, were still to be considered abusive; 2) older persons themselves could sometimes trigger abusive situations; 3) failing to report elder abuse could be due to family members or onlookers' reluctance to get involved; and 4) a multidisciplinary approach was needed to prevent elder abuse, together with efforts to change attitudes towards older people.

### **3.6.6 Comparing perspectives of elder abuse amongst the public, professionals and older people**

As in the study above some researchers have sought to obtain perspectives of elder abuse among differing groups. This section considers the relevant literature and compares perceptions of elder abuse amongst the general public, professionals and older people.

As described above, Hudson (1991) used a 3-round Delphi study with experts to establish a taxonomy and definition of elder abuse. She and her colleagues then conducted several subsequent studies (Hudson 1994, Hudson et al. 2000, Hudson and Carlson 1998, 1999) to examine the extent of public agreement with this taxonomy and definition. Some disagreements were noted. For example the expert panel (a mixture of clinicians, researchers and policy-makers) considered abuse as having to be '*of sufficient intensity and/or frequency*' to warrant the label, while the general public in Hudson and Carlson's study (1998)

suggested that one act of abuse was sufficient to warrant the label.

Another area of difference between professional and public understandings of elder abuse is the greater emphasis placed on psychological abuse by the public, with professionals historically considering physical abuse to be more extreme than other forms of elder abuse (Pillemer and Finkelhor 1989). In contrast, it seems that the public view psychological abuse to be at least as detrimental as physical abuse (Anetzberger et al. 1996, Hudson and Carlson 1998, Moon and Benton 2000).

In Australia, Hempton et al. (2011) used the Caregiving Scenario Questionnaire (CSQ) to explore the perceptions of elder abuse among 361 older people and 89 professionals (clinical staff working in aged care programmes, including doctors, nurses and allied health professionals). They found that there was limited agreement between the two groups regarding what constituted elder abuse. The study highlighted that the professional group was more likely to identify abusive situations than the public.

In summary, studies indicate that despite some agreement, there are several noteworthy differences between professionals and the general public, including older people, in their perceptions and understanding of elder abuse. However there has been relatively little research on the perceptions of Chinese older people and professionals in Hong Kong, where it is likely that differences may well exist, with Yan and Tang (2001) pointing out that Chinese older adults are reluctant to report elder abuse because their desire to maintain family harmony and honour is an over-riding concern. This again highlights the importance of considering the cultural dimension to elder abuse.



### **3.6.7 The need for a culturally sensitive understanding of elder abuse**

The importance of incorporating cultural sensitivity in the study of elder abuse is becoming increasingly well documented. It is clear that neglect and abuse are phenomena that reflect a society's distinction between acceptable and unacceptable interpersonal behaviours (Hudson and Carlson 1998). Cultural values, beliefs and traditions significantly affect family and individual life, and culture influences if a given individual or society considers certain behaviours / situations to be abusive or not. Given the extent of cultural diversity the degree of such variation is likely to be considerable.

Culturally specific definitions of elder abuse are evident in a small number of cross-cultural studies in this field. For example, Sanchez (1999) found a new type of abuse in the Mexican American community termed '*denial of shelter*'. The study concluded that refusing co-residence with elderly parents was perceived as the most frequently occurring type of abuse in the community. In another study, Tomita (1999) identified a further type of elder abuse, which she called the '*silent treatment*' amongst the Japanese American community. In this cultural context, '*silent treatment*' is used to express hatred, anger and disagreement in what appears to an outsider to be a '*polite*' way, but this was perceived to be the coldest form of treatment among the older people in the study.

A high sensitivity to psychological abuse was also identified in a cross-cultural comparison of four groups of older people: African Americans, European Americans, Japanese Americans and Puerto Ricans living in Seattle, US (Anetzberger 1998). The worst thing for the European Americans and Puerto Ricans was neglect, while for older Japanese Americans and African Americans

it was psychological abuse. All the Japanese Americans reported that providing emotional support was *the* most important thing that family members could do for older people. From these studies, it is increasingly clear that what constitutes elder abuse varies across ethnic groups.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

In summary, the literature considered in this chapter highlights a range of issues that helped to inform this study and to shape the foreshadowed questions. These include the following: (1) the population of Hong Kong is ageing rapidly and the prevalence of elder abuse may rise accordingly, so there is a need for further research to enhance understanding of elder abuse; (2) elder abuse is generally underreported and there is still no universal consensus as to a definition; (3) behaviours that might be considered as abusive in one culture may be seen very differently in another; and (4) despite the increase in research into elder abuse, little of this has focused on the perspectives of Chinese older people, especially in Hong Kong.

This chapter has provided the rationale for my study, highlighting that little attention have been paid to the issue of elder abuse within the Chinese socio-cultural context. As the literature points out traditional cultural values and social norms are likely to affect both an individual's perception of elder abuse and their likelihood of seeking help.

It is also clear that globally there have been relatively few studies that seek to understand elder abuse from the perspectives of older people themselves, with no such study having been conducted in Hong Kong. Bringing together my own prior knowledge, the limited availability of public material and discourse in

Hong Kong and insights from the literature resulted in the following initial foreshadowed questions that will be explored in the study:

1. What are the perceptions of what constitutes elder abuse among a sample of Chinese community-dwelling participants aged 65 or over?
2. What beliefs about help-seeking behaviours are there among a sample of community-dwelling participants aged 65 or over faced with potentially abusive situations?
3. What are the perceptions of what constitutes elder abuse and what current interventions are employed among a sample of professionals (social workers and/or community nurses)?
4. Based on the above is it possible generate a 'theory' informing a better understanding of elder abuse among community-dwelling Chinese older people and professionals in Hong Kong that can be used to raise awareness and shape interventions?

The next chapter will consider the methods to be used to explore these issues.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY

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#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the methodology chosen to undertake the study and justifies the research strategies that were used. The foreshadowed questions and sensitizing concepts informing the study were outlined in the previous chapter; here attention is turned to the methodology used to address these. After outlining the rationale for the use of a qualitative method, the reason for selecting a constructivist grounded theory approach is considered alongside the development of grounded theory and its philosophical underpinnings. Subsequently the way in which the study was undertaken is described in some detail, including ethical considerations. Finally, the chapter concludes by outlining the approach taken to gauging the ‘*quality*’ of the study together with my stance on reflexivity.

#### 4.2 Research design: why a qualitative research approach?

This study focused on exploring the perceptions of elder abuse among community-dwelling older Chinese people and health and social care professionals who work with older people in Hong Kong. Specifically, the study sought to develop an understanding of the complex nature of elder abuse including older people’s perceptions of what constitutes elder abuse, their potential help-seeking preferences and health and social care professionals’ preferred interventions when faced with abusive situations.

When considering which broad research approach (quantitative or qualitative) to use in this study, I asked myself one main question: ‘*which approach would*

*best address the research questions?*' Given the nature and aims of the study, and the fact that little prior work had been undertaken on the subject of enquiry, a qualitative research method seemed most appropriate.

It has been suggested that qualitative methods should be used when little is known about a phenomenon and/or when the investigator suspects that existing knowledge or theories may not be fully developed (Morse and Field 1995). Although elder abuse is not a new phenomenon, as noted above, the perspectives of community-dwelling older Chinese people regarding this matter have hitherto seldom been explored.

Moreover, as mentioned in Chapter 2, Hong Kong's contemporary knowledge and theories about elder abuse have been mostly borrowed from Western countries. In this context, a qualitative method was deemed the most appropriate to answer the foreshadowed questions that were outlined at the end of the previous chapter as such methods seek to both describe and understand how and why people act in the way that they do (Rice 1996).

When researchers use qualitative approaches, reality is explored from an emic perspective in order to try to understand life and incidents from the perspective of '*insiders*' (in my case both older participants and health and social care professionals) in an uncontrolled, naturalistic setting (Morse and Field 1995). This broad approach was consistent with my goals so the next question became: *which of the many potential qualitative approaches should I adopt?*

From amongst the range of potential qualitative approaches, this study employed an exploratory and explanatory design based on the principles and techniques of grounded theory. Grounded theory (Glaser 1978, 1992; Glaser and

Strauss 1967), as will be described in detail later, is a methodology that seeks to understand the social processes operating within social structures and is attentive to issues of interpretation without being tied to existing theories and assumptions. Moreover, in addition to adding to knowledge, this approach seeks to generate insights that are likely to have application in the 'real' world (Charmaz 2006). This was the approach adopted in the present study.

### ***Why grounded theory and why not other qualitative approaches?***

Grounded theory is one of a range of qualitative approaches and it is necessary to consider why it was selected in preference to other alternatives. The key to good qualitative research is selecting the best method to answer the research question(s) (Morse and Richards 2002) and compared with other methods of qualitative inquiry, such as phenomenology and ethnography, grounded theory was considered the most appropriate.

Phenomenology, founded by a German, Edmund Husserl in 1913, is both a research approach and a philosophy (Moustakas 1994). As a method, the basic purpose of phenomenology is to describe the meaning that individuals make of their lived experience of a particular phenomenon, such as the study of lived experience of birthing pain (Kelpin 1984). In the present study however, the goal was to generate a substantive theory on the issue of elder abuse as perceived by the stakeholder groups in Hong Kong's socio-cultural context, and that this theory should help to inform practice / understanding in this area. Such aims do not lend themselves to a phenomenological approach.

Ethnography as a form of naturalistic research method focuses on describing and interpreting cultures as shared by particular groups or societies (Van Manen

1997). It usually involves extended periods of participant observation in which the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the participants and gathers data intended to illuminate the culture(s) that shape participants' lives (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). According to Arnould and Wallendorf (1994), the characteristics of a typical ethnographic approach include: 1) it collects data in natural settings; 2) prolonged participant observation is a common way of data collection; 3) it uses multiple data sources in order to generate an interpretation which is based on the values of informants.

Whilst there was clearly a cultural dimension to my study it was not the sole consideration, rather it was hoped that the insights gained could be used to consider ways in which elder abuse could be addressed. Moreover, the use of prolonged participant observation as in ethnography was not deemed appropriate in the study of elder abuse. More importantly, the ultimate goal of this study was to generate a mid-range substantive theory to explain the phenomenon of elder abuse in the Hong Kong context. During the theory building process, researcher and participants needed to interact to contribute to the final co-construction. Hence, ethnography was not considered to be the best way to explore the study goals. The next section will discuss in further detail why a grounded theory approach was chosen.

### **4.3 Grounded theory: the methodology**

Grounded theory was first developed in the 1960s and since then it has become a major qualitative research methodology especially in applied social research. It was '*discovered*' and developed in the 1960s by Barney Glaser, a quantitative researcher and Anslem Strauss, a qualitative researcher during a major

sociological investigation of death and dying in health care settings. Grounded theory was first described in detail in the seminal work: “*The Discovery of Grounded Theory*” (Glaser and Strauss 1967), and the approach was further developed by Glaser in “*Theoretical Sensitivity*” (1978). A set of guidelines are provided by these two books for undertaking sociological research with the goal of generating, as opposed to testing, theory, using inductive logic. That is, grounded theory does not begin with an existing theory, and then seek to prove it; rather it begins with an area of study and allows the relevant theory to emerge from the data gathered during the study (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The objectives and essence of grounded theory as originally stated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) were as follows:

*In this book we address ourselves to the equally important enterprise of how the discovery of theory from data – systematically obtained and analyzed in social research – can be furthered. We believe that the discovery of theory from data – which we call grounded theory – is a major task confronting sociology today, for as we shall try to show such a theory fits empirical situations, and is understandable to sociologists and layman alike. Most important, it works – provides us with relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations and applications. (p.1)*

Grounded theory emphasizes the importance of meaning, perceptions, interactions and context in the comprehension of a particular phenomenon. Importantly, as noted above, it should also ‘work’ in the real world and have practical application. In this study, my goal was to develop a theory that would help to explain how community-dwelling older people in Hong Kong and their health and social care professionals perceive and respond to elder abuse. The idea, as noted above, that it should be ‘understandable to... laymen’ and that it



should ‘work’, for me cemented the appeal of grounded theory.

### ***Grounded theory and its philosophical underpinnings***

It is well documented that grounded theory has its origins in symbolic interactionism (Benoliel 1996), a philosophical perspective which reasons that humans act toward their surroundings (persons and/or situations) based on the meanings they perceive that these things have for them. These meanings are derived from social interactions with others and are modified over time through an interpretative process (Baker et al. 1992, Blumer 1969); consequently, the method focuses on the dynamic relationship between meaning and actions (Charmaz 2006).

Symbolic interactionism, as a social psychological and sociological theory, originated from American Pragmatism (Schwandt 1997). As stated in Blumer’s seminal text (1969), symbolic interactionism is grounded in three basic principles:

*... [Firstly] humans act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; ... [secondly] the meaning of such things is drawn from the social interaction that one has with one’s peers; ... [thirdly] these meanings are then modified through an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things encountered. (p. 2)*

To a certain extent, the pragmatic influence of symbolic interactionism takes the view that an empirical science – ‘truth’ – presumes the existence of an empirical world, which ‘exists’ as something available for observation or discovery (Chamberlain-Salaun et al. 2013). This perspective on social life that is implanted in symbolic interactionism has been challenged by later writers on

grounded theory such as Charmaz (2000), who propose a more dynamic approach to understanding human behavior whilst also acknowledging that a 'real world' exists. In proposing a constructivist approach, Charmaz sums her position up in the following way:

*"... the constructivist approach does not seek truth – single, universal, and lasting. Still, it remains realist because it addresses human realities and assumes the existence of real worlds."* (p.523).

Such an approach recognizes knowledge as a mutual creation between the viewer and the viewed, and this was entirely consistent with my aim of engaging with people and seeking their perceptions on the phenomenon of elder abuse. Therefore, whilst I adopted grounded theory as the broad methodological underpinning for my study it was the constructivist approach that most appealed. This, as will be described below, is one of the more recent variants in the evolution of grounded theory.

### ***The evolution of grounded theory***

As with other research methodologies, grounded theory has evolved throughout the decades since its initial development by Glaser and Strauss in the mid-1960s. During the 1970s these two scholars have taken grounded theory in somewhat different directions (Charmaz 2000) – Glaser by himself and Strauss with his colleague Juliet Corbin. This resulted initially in the formation of two distinct variants of grounded theory: The Glaserian version on the one hand and on the other, the Strauss and Corbin's version (Charmaz 2006, McCallin 2003). In Strauss's later works with Corbin, the link with symbolic interactionism became more distant (Clarke 2005). Gradually, there emerged a third 'school' of

grounded theory, moving further away from the positivism which some saw as being associated with the previous two schools of grounded theory (Bryant 2003, Charmaz 2000, 2006; Clarke 2005).

These methodological variants of grounded theory have evolved and changed with the socio-political-economic and intellectual contexts in which they developed (Dey 2003) and have resulted in different interpretations of grounded theory. In deciding upon an appropriate approach in a given study, it is essential to consider such variations in methods (McCallin 2003). I therefore read extensively in the area of grounded theory, which provided an opportunity to become acquainted with some of the differences between the various schools that existed.

The Glaserian version, for instance, is known for its ontological roots in critical realism, which assumes that reality is out there in an objective world and that the researcher is deemed to be independent of the research per se, standing outside of the social world and therefore able to interpret that reality ‘objectively’ (Annells 1996). Within classic or traditional grounded theory, it seems that ‘*all*’ reality is to be discovered by the researcher who acts as an objective bystander keeping a distance from said ‘*reality*’.

On the other hand, Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that the researcher is more involved and is not an entirely detached observer. They clearly stated that they do not believe in the existence of a “*pre-existing reality ‘out there.’ To think otherwise is to take a positivistic position that ... we reject... Our position is that truth is enacted*” (Strauss and Corbin 1994, p.279). Fundamentally, these two scholars declared that: “*theories are embedded in ‘history’ – historical*

*epochs, eras and moments are to be taken into account in the creation, judgment, revision and reformulation of theories” (p.280).*

Similar to this version, constructivist grounded theory has its ontological roots in relativism but takes this considerably further. Therefore, constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2000 & 2006, Charmaz and Mitchell 2001) takes a reflexive and interactive approach to creating ‘*knowledge*’ and is located, as the name suggests, in the constructivist-interpretative paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). Constructivist research approaches assume a relativist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology. As such, advocates of these approaches promote the co-construction of understandings of the subject under discussion involving both participants and the researcher (Denzin and Lincoln 2005).

In relation to grounded theory, Charmaz (2000, 2006) sees a constructivist approach as being a profoundly interactive research method in which participants and the researcher interact at all stages. Therefore, constructivist grounded theorists view the researcher as part of the process of inquiry, and the researcher’s observations, worldviews and interpretations therefore become part of the data. Consequently, constructivist grounded theories are informed by the researcher’s “*past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices*” (Charmaz 2006, p.10) and “*what the researcher brings to the data influences what they see within it*” (Charmaz 2006, p15). This was the approach that I chose to adopt because throughout the process of data collections and analysis, my personal background, values and understanding of the context must have exerted some impact on how I saw things, to a greater or lesser extent. Consequently, as a researcher, I needed to be cautious of but not ignore such influences.

#### **4.4 Using a constructivist grounded theory approach as the strategy of inquiry**

##### *An overview of constructivist grounded theory*

Having decided to adopt a constructivist approach, I needed to consider the implications of this in more detail. Constructivist inquiry is a research methodology that integrates manifold standpoints in an effort to achieve a more complete understanding of the issue being explored from the perspectives of all the participants, including the researcher. As such, perspectives are drawn together in a non-hierarchical manner.

All positions are valued as equally relevant and important for examination and analysis (Rodwell 1998). In other words, constructivist inquiry demands the contemplation of all possibilities and all perspectives. This research methodology values and honours the multiple views that are brought to the study – an approach which fits the purposes of my study.

In adopting a constructivist approach (Charmaz 2006) the researcher enters the field with as few pre-conceptions as possible but does have a list of '*sensitising concepts*' and '*foreshadowed questions*' (Blumer 1969, O'Conner 2008) that have been identified from the literature and any prior insights that the researcher has. These form the basis of the interview guide that provides shape and direction for the interactions that occur between the researcher and the participants. However, the '*guide*' is a very loose structure and it is anticipated that it will evolve as data collection and analysis proceed.

How the foreshadowed questions were developed in this study has already been described in the literature review chapter and the nature of the interview will be

considered further in the following sections.

Whilst there are clear differences in some of the various philosophical approaches to grounded theory, for Charmaz (2006) constructivist grounded theory uses the same basic methodological principles as objectivist approaches and she sees the constant comparative method and theoretical sampling as essential research tools (see below). However, in the constructivist approach, there is far greater recognition of the interactive relationship between the researcher and the participants, in both data collection and analysis.

Charmaz (2006) also advocates the writing of the resultant theory in a language and using ideas/concepts that are easily understood by the participants themselves. I adopted this approach at the initial stage of the literature review: to read broadly, including local newspapers, and materials that were written in Chinese and/or English. In essence, Charmaz (2005, 2006) provided me with a way of ‘doing’ grounded theory that reflected the theoretical and methodological developments of recent decades. Therefore, constructivist grounded theory provides a set of principles and practices, which equate to a toolkit rather than a set of prescriptions (Charmaz 2006). Consequently, flexible guidelines, rather than methodological rules and requirements, are emphasized.

As Charmaz (2006, pp.9-10) suggests, it is possible (and I view it preferable in this study) to use the basic grounded theory guidelines such as coding, memo-writing and sorting, and theoretical sampling that were originally developed more than 40 years ago and combine these with the methodological assumptions and approaches of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The new assumption considers that “*neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and*

*the data we collect.*” (Charmaz 2006, p.10); and she continues to advocate the new approach for grounded theorists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in developing a grounded theory is not by ‘*discovery*’, but should “*construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices*” (Charmaz 2006, p.10).

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), a grounded theory study aims to build rather than test theory. Grounded theory tries to find out a possible explanation for an event or phenomenon. Something occurs; how do we account for it? This study sought to understand the beliefs and values that shaped the perceptions of and responses to elder abuse in the local community context.

I was convinced that adopting a constructivist approach in my study was both possible and desirable because as Charmaz puts it, “*Data do not provide a window on reality. Rather, the ‘discovered’ reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts*” (Charmaz 2000, p.524).

How I applied these principles is considered shortly, but before this, I describe some central tenets of grounded theory methodology.

### ***Some shared principles and their application in this study***

Despite the evolution of differing approaches to grounded theory, as noted above, some common elements remain. The two most important are theoretical sampling and constant comparison. These are considered briefly below.

***Theoretical sampling*** is the primary process that guides the researcher’s decisions about what data to collect next (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Theoretical

sampling involves a conscious decision on the part of the researcher to find new data sources – including types of participants, interview questions and observations, that can help to clarify the researcher’s understanding about the concepts that are emerging and how they are related (Glaser 1998). With the development of codes and categories and by using theoretical sampling the researcher “*seeks and collects pertinent data to elaborate and refine categories in the emerging theory.*” (Charmaz 2006, p. 96).

The rationale behind theoretical sampling is to direct data gathering efforts towards collecting information that will best support the development of the emerging theoretical framework (Locke 2001). With this approach, researchers may choose those participants most likely: to develop and support the emergent theory; to refine, consolidate or extend the emergent theory; or even to highlight dissenting views to help differentiate the boundaries of the emergent theory (Shah and Corley 2006).

The second core element of grounded theory approaches is **constant comparison**. Constant comparison and theoretical sampling work hand in hand and reinforce the dynamic nature of data collection and analysis in grounded theory.

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the constant comparative method consists of four steps: comparing incidents applicable to each category, integrating categories and their properties, delimiting the theory, and writing the theory. These will be considered in more detail shortly.

Below I provide a couple of examples of how theoretical sampling was used in my study.



In order to explore the perspectives of, and responses to, elder abuse amongst the participants, I started with purposeful sampling and asked eligible participants a provisional question to explore in broad terms what would constitute 'elder abuse' (see later for a fuller description). I followed this up with another broad question in order to find out what 'elder abuse' meant to them. I then used my analysis of their responses to either guide the recruitment of further participants or to shape the nature of the issues to be explored.

For example, the idea of adult children being unfilial (不孝) to a parent as a form of elder abuse appeared early in the data. I therefore explored further what was meant by the idea of 'filial' behaviour and how and in what circumstances behavior seen as being 'unfilial' could constitute potential abuse.

Another example of employing theoretical sampling in the study can be seen in the way that vignettes were used and refined alongside data collection and analysis. In this study, interviews were augmented by the use of 'vignettes'. A vignette is a narrative description of an event or situation which can be seen as typical or representative of a particular phenomenon. The use of vignettes, as suggested by Jenkins et al. (2010), is an unthreatening way to explore sensitive issues. As elder abuse is one such topic I believed that the use of vignettes would facilitate the exchange of ideas and feelings in a sensitive and non- threatening way.

In the study, the vignettes that were used during in the interview (see later) were revised as data analysis expanded their boundaries (see Appendix 1 and 2 for the various versions of vignettes used). Adjusting the scenarios in the vignettes as a result of data analysis, and using them for further data collection not only

enabled me to be more focused and sensitive to participants' language, but enhanced the co-construction employed in the study.

Constant comparison techniques were also applied throughout the study with the essential steps incorporated during the various coding procedures that were employed (see later for a much fuller discussion). Using the technique of constant comparison, I kept returning to the data and comparing data with data to identify similarities and differences. This was done both within the same interview as well as across interviews. This helped both to build categories and also to deconstruct them so that the full complexity and diversity of the data was duly recognised. The final goal of constant comparative method is to attain *'theoretical elaboration, saturation and densification of concepts'* (Holton 2007, p.278). The final theory will provide an indication of whether this has been achieved.

Having considered the broad principles of grounded theory, attention is now turned to the methods that were employed.

#### **4.5 Research methods, context and procedures**

##### **Data collection methods**

*"Man is a data-gathering animal."* Glaser (1962, P. 74)

Although Charmaz (2006) suggests that methods are mere tools in the researcher's toolkit, methods do have consequences and they need to be considered carefully. Effective methods answer the research question(s) with ingenuity and incisiveness (Charmaz 2006). *How* the data are collected will also have an impact on *which* phenomena the researcher will *see*; *how*, *when* and

where they will be viewed, and *what* sense the researcher will make of them (Charmaz 2006). For this reason, careful thought was given to determine the best possible data collection methods for this study.

Among the various data collection methods available for grounded theory studies, interviews (augmented by vignettes) and focus group discussions were adopted in this study because they are effective ways of collecting rich information, whilst facilitating the active involvement of participants (Charmaz 2002). Unlike a structured survey or a questionnaire which allows the collection of extensive data from a relatively large number of participants but on a limited range of issues, in-depth interviews and focus groups are useful for gaining a more nuanced understanding of the perspectives of individuals by encouraging participants to talk about their personal feelings, opinions and experiences, while focus groups provide insights into shared perspectives (Mack et al. 2005). While in-depth interviews and focus group discussions are time consuming, they provide one of the best ways to give ‘*voice*’ to the participants’ perspectives of elder abuse or other sensitive topics; as Kvale (1996 p.88) put it they are a: “*construction site of knowledge*” and facilitate reflexive and interactive processes with the participants, an essential element in a constructivist approach.

### ***Interview guide and vignettes***

The interviews were initially given direction by the use of an *interview guide*. This broad guide (Appendix 3) contained a set of open-ended questions that were based on the ‘*foreshadowed questions*’ arising from the literature review and my prior experiences in the area. I followed Charmaz’s (2006) suggestion that while such personal perspectives need to be acknowledged and recognized

they should not dominate data collection. Therefore, the ‘*guide*’ was a loosely constructed one that was not followed rigorously. Consequently, questions were not fixed, but were shaped and directed by the content and flow of discussion. Moreover, the guide evolved over time (see Appendix 4) as data collection and analysis proceeded.

In this study, interviews were augmented by the use of ‘*vignettes*’. A vignette is a narrative description of an event or situation, which can be seen as typical or representative of a particular phenomenon. The use of vignettes, as suggested by Jenkins et al. (2010), is an unthreatening way to explore sensitive issues. As elder abuse is one such topic I believed that the use of vignettes would facilitate the exchange of ideas and feelings in a sensitive and non-threatening way. The vignettes used in the study were developed from a number of differing sources, these included: the literature review, (for example, the scenario about the wife who refused to dine with her older spouse who had Parkinson’s disease (Hong Kong Christian Services and Hong Kong Social Welfare Department - 同路同心 - 真實虐老個案分享 2005) and my personal experience (a vignette about older parents who were ‘banned’ by their adult children from going outdoors for morning exercise, was based on a real life experience amongst my relatives), and discussions with health care professionals (such as the scenario concerning whether the use of newspaper to manage an older spouse’s incontinence was abusive or not). The health care professionals who helped with the construction of the vignettes were not subsequently interviewed as part of the project. In addition to the vignettes developed at the outset further examples were added as data collection and analysis took. Please see Appendix 1 for full range of vignettes used.

Because the nature of what might constitute elder abuse had not been explored in detail before with a Chinese population, it was considered important to include a wide range of potentially abusive situations so as not to exclude possible examples before they had been thoroughly explored with the participants. The vignettes I used also needed to reflect differing family relations and dynamics, as well as a range of situations that were likely to be encountered in everyday life in Hong Kong. I could not rely on the literature alone as source material because, as has already been explained, it is dominated by Western cultural influences.

The subtle variations in the vignettes I developed therefore helped me to differentiate and delimit the nature of what elder abuse means to Chinese older people and health care professionals, and the influences that shaped participants' meaning-making processes (see later). The vignettes were presented and discussed towards the end of the interviews to build on and elaborate earlier discussions. I felt that this approach would allow participants to freely express their views whilst also focusing their thoughts on the topic area. As such, the use of the vignettes within the study are best seen as a deliberate strategy to extend and deepen discussion and communication with my participants in a way that interviews alone were unlikely to achieve. In the event they proved highly successful and contributed significantly to the range and depth of the data that was generated.

As will be seen later, the vignettes focused on a number of topics that allowed a fuller exploration of what might, or might not, constitute elder abuse. As noted above the vignettes were refined and revised (Appendix 2) using the process of constant comparison drawing on data from both the open interviews and the

response to the vignettes. The refined vignettes were then used for subsequent interviews and focus groups. This greatly aided the process of theoretical sampling.

### ***Demographic data sheet***

To collect information about the participants' relevant personal data such as age, marital status, educational level, living arrangements, employment and financial status, and so forth, demographic data sheets were developed for both the older participants (Appendix 5) and the professionals (Appendix 6). These data sheets provided background information about the participants.

### ***Pilot work***

To test out the terms, wording and phrases of questions to be used in interviews, pilot work was conducted with two pilot focus groups. One comprised three older persons from Day Care Centres and was undertaken in September 2011; the other comprised a group of seven healthcare professionals from the long-term care sector, conducted in November 2011.

In the older persons' pilot focus group, the three participants were all female and aged 73, 72 and 75 respectively. They were selected following introduction by a volunteer I met in a Day Centre for Elders as being people who would enjoy taking part and would be likely to speak openly. Their feedback was very helpful in clarifying the use of various, and sometimes subtle, Chinese terms. For example, they pointed out that I would need to be careful when using the abbreviated term for elder abuse in Chinese (虐老) as it sounded almost the same as (藥老) – meaning an older person needing to take multiple drugs; or

(弱老) – which refers to frail older persons.

A further purpose of the pilot focus groups was to ask the participants to look at the vignettes that had been developed (Appendices 1 and 2) describing potentially abusive situations that were to be used in exploring further sensitive issues during the interviews. As a result of this process, potentially difficult terms or medical jargon were simplified / modified to facilitate subsequent data collection.

Based on the pilot work, I modified the interview guide and the vignette scenarios so that the materials would engage subsequent participants more appropriately. For example, the use of the term elder abuse, as described above. I also noted that many older people started to look a bit tired or to lose their attention after about 60 minutes. I was aware of this and sought to avoid overtiring the older people during the interviews, by for example, offering a break or to come back on another occasion.

A pilot focus group was conducted in November 2011 with a group of seven professionals working in long-term care area. The purpose of this was to provide me with better insights into the subject matter at the beginning of the study, to clarify terms to be used in subsequent data collection with professionals, and to help me refine the vignette scenarios to be used in subsequent interviews. Because they were from institutions rather than community, their data was not included in the database for analysis.

My supervisors also contributed to this initial work, for example, by advising that I prepare the written vignettes in large print versions and have them

laminated so that I could show them to the participants and let them read them if they wanted. In the event, most of the older participants preferred me to read them out loud as they had limited literacy skills.

### ***Context for the study***

Some details about Hong Kong were provided in chapter 2 but in order to set a more detailed context for the study further information is provided here. Hong Kong is situated at the southeastern tip of China and it is a major gateway to mainland China. Hong Kong has a total area of about 1104 square kilometers, covering Hong Kong Island, Kowloon Peninsula and the New Territories. Hong Kong's population was approximately 7.184 million in mid-2013. People of Chinese descent comprise the vast majority of the population, about 92%. The latest statistics revealed that there were about 1.027 million people aged 65 and above (Census and Statistic Department Hong Kong 2013).

With reference to the statistics provided by the Census and Statistics Department (Thematic Report: Older Persons 2011), among the 18 District Council districts, Kwun Tong had the largest number of older persons living in the community, constituting 10.8% of older persons in Hong Kong. The districts with the second and third largest number of older persons are Eastern (9.8%) and Kwai Tsing (8.0%) respectively. These settings provide a rich pool of older people and so the study was conducted mainly in Kwun Tong and Eastern District.

### ***Sample recruitment methods and criteria***

Grounded theory initially uses non-probability sampling where the sample numbers or data sources are unknown at the beginning of the study (Glaser and



Strauss 1967, Strauss and Corbin 1998). Purposive sampling was used in the initial stages (followed by theoretical sampling) to recruit individual and focus groups participants who met the inclusion criteria below.

In order to achieve the overall goals of the study (to develop a substantive theory to better understand the perceptions of and responses to elder abuse), the following recruitment criteria were developed.

Older participants were included if they met the following criteria: (1) 65 years old and/or above; (2) Chinese; (3) able to communicate in Cantonese or Mandarin; (4) living in the community; (5) mentally competent – (formal assessment was not undertaken but I used common sense based on my professional knowledge and training in determining potential participant's mental capacity to consent to participate when initiating conversation when we first met, and/or the views of professionals working with the older people) without mental illness / severe cognitive impairment; and (6) able and willing to provide oral and written informed consent.

Health and social care professionals were also recruited. The criteria included: (1) they must have had experience of working with community-dwelling older people, (2) they had experience of handling elder abuse cases; and (3) were able to provide written informed consent. All the professional participants, including community nurses and community-based social workers, were recruited through recommendation from personal networks. They were initially approached via e-mails and/or the telephone. After receiving their verbal consent, a mutually convenient time and place were negotiated. The interviews and focus groups started after their written consent was obtained. Again,

participants were assured confidentiality, and that they had no obligation to participate if they did not want to, and that they had full right to withdraw from the interviews without explanation.

### ***Recruitment procedure – individual interviews***

Recruitment for individual interviews and focus groups was conducted over a period of nearly 36 months, between 29 October 2011 and 1 October 2014.

I had initially sought to recruit older participants from the numerous public parks in Hong Kong. These are settings in which many local older people like to spend their morning hours meeting together, reading or exercising and so seemed to constitute the sort of '*naturalistic*' environment recommended in many texts. To familiarize myself with these settings I started spending some mornings in those parks in Hung Hom, the Eastern district, and Kwun Tong district. During this time, I observed older peoples' activities and started to talk to a few.

After a few conversations, I introduced the study to them and asked if they might be interested in taking part. I provided the information sheet to those who showed an interest (see later) and asked them to read the material and return the next day if they wanted to participate. Four older participants were recruited in this way. Very soon however, I found that the parks were not the optimal venue I had thought they would be. The traffic noise and strong wind made it quite difficult to listen to the tape recordings of the interviews and the space was probably too public for the discussion of a sensitive topic such as elder abuse. An alternative source of recruitment was therefore sought.

Subsequently the primary source of older participants was a nurse-led health clinic and a number of Elder Day Centres. The nurse-led health clinic was recommended by one of the professionals I interviewed, who suggested that it would be a good way of recruiting quite frail older people who were nonetheless still living in the community. In contrast, attendees at the Day Centres were more likely to be physically active and able.

There are numerous such centres throughout Hong Kong. They are mostly run by non-government organisations and their main function is to provide a forum for social interaction and neighborhood support services to people aged 60 and above. To recruit older people, I began by communicating with the various centres in different districts. Their contact details were obtained either via their official websites as listed on the relevant home pages, or through my network of colleagues and friends who knew staff at some of these centres. Liaison with the relevant responsible personnel, such as the supervisors in charge of Day Care Centres, was ongoing throughout the entire recruitment period.

During the initial contact process, research information sheets (see Appendix 7-English version and 8-Chinese version) were provided to centres so that they could help to give initial information to potential participants. Upon my visit to the venues, I approached individuals who had indicated interest in the study to Centre staff and explained the objectives and approach of the study in person. If they were still interested, the informed consent form (Appendix 9-Chinese version, or 10-English version) was signed.

In the process, I remained mindful not to do this in a rushed manner. Potential participants were encouraged to delay the interview until a time of their

choosing. An adequate ‘cooling off’ period, of at least 24 hours was deliberately suggested to potential participants so that they could change their mind if they wished. However, many were happy to be interviewed immediately as they had already discussed potential participation with Centre staff before I visited.

With regard to professionals, a similar approach was adopted to recruit community-based social workers and nurses. Only those professionals who were interested and willing to participate, who had experience of working with community-dwelling seniors, and experience of handling elder abuse situations, were recruited. Again, the relevant information sheets (Appendix 7 and/or 8) were used to provide a clear description of the study. Individual professionals were encouraged to contact me if they had any questions or wished to seek clarification about any aspect of the study.

As with the older people, potential professional participants were provided with an adequate ‘cooling off period’ before giving their consent. Interviews were conducted on a date and in a place selected by the participants. This was often one or two weeks after the initial negotiation and hence, there was adequate time for them to think about whether to participate or not. Their consent to participate was re-confirmed prior to commencing the interviews.

### ***Recruitment procedure – focus groups***

A total of three focus group discussions were conducted in the course of the study. The three groups included a group of four community nurses, a group of five social workers, and a group of eight older persons respectively. The procedure for recruiting focus groups of both older people and professionals was similar to that used to recruit the participants for individual interviews.

In all cases, including 36 individual interviews and three focus groups, all the interested participants were given adequate information about the nature and potential effects of the study. Potential participants were reassured that their individual autonomy in deciding whether to participate in the study or not would be duly respected, and that there would be no consequences or unwanted effects on them if they chose not to take part or if they chose to withdraw at any point.

Further details of the participants' profiles will be reported in the next chapter.

### *Implementing data collection*

With the broad aim of exploring what elder abuse meant to older people and healthcare professionals, and what their help-seeking preferences might be, the interviews were open-ended and interactive. After initial open-ended questions, gentle probes were used if necessary to enrich the description of the participant's perceptions and to focus the interview (Morse and Field 1995). In addition, as noted above, vignettes (Appendix 1 and 2) were used to enable the researcher and the participants – older people and professionals – to explore their perceptions of elder abuse in a more focused and concrete way; to express their opinions of what they thought was and was not elder abuse; and what they would do if they experienced such abusive behaviour or suspected that someone might be being abused.

The vignettes were presented and discussed towards the end of the interview to build on and elaborate earlier discussions. Each scenario was translated into Chinese and as noted above laminated on small cards. Participants were given the option of reading them themselves or for them to be read out by me. The

latter was chosen by a number of older people who had low levels of literacy.

All of the individual interviews and focus groups were conducted face-to-face and scheduled for a time and place that was convenient to all parties involved. Individual interviews lasted from 40 minutes to 80 minutes each, whilst focus group discussions lasted from 60 minutes to 100 minutes each.

With consent, interviews and focus group discussions were audiotaped by use of digital recorder, for later transcription of the data. Recording of discussions was beneficial as it enabled me to focus on conducting the interview, rather than on the process of taking detailed notes (Charmaz 2006). Furthermore, audio recording of the interviews allowed full transcription of the data verbatim, a process which greatly assisted with the analysis of the interviews. Audio recording also helped to reduce the risks of me '*forcing*' the data based on preconceived ideas (Charmaz 2006).

### ***Phases of data collection***

After the pilot work described above, actual data collection then began. During the study, four phases of data collection and concurrent analysis were undertaken. Table 4.1 summarises the phrases of data collection and analysis in the study.

The first phase was broadly exploratory. Analysis of these early interviews suggested that Chinese traditional culture seemed to play an important role in determining what constituted elder abuse. Therefore, in the second phase of data collection, this thread was followed up and questions such as: "*what is the*

*influence of traditional culture (filial piety) in the understanding of elder abuse?”*

were used to explore this further and to discover potential linkages between categories.

**Table 4.1 Diagrammatic representation of the process of data collection and level of data analysis**

<u>Phases of data collection</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Data source</u>	<u>Research Questions</u>
<i>Phase 1:</i>	Discover as many relevant categories (including their properties and dimensions)	Older people: interviews, focus group Document: document review/analysis	I. Have you heard about the term ‘elder abuse’? II. What constitutes elder abuse? III. What would your response to an abusive situation be?
<i>Phase 2:</i>	Explore emerging differences at a dimensional level and uncover the links between categories	Focus group (Prof) Interviews with older people and professionals, utilizing theoretical sampling Documents	I – III, as above plus IV. What is the influence of traditional culture values (e.g. filial piety) in their understanding of elder abuse in the local context?
<i>Phase 3:</i>	Continue to develop concepts by grounding in the context of the data as it emerges	Interviews of older people and professionals Documents	I – IV, as above and V. To what extent do traditional culture values influences their perceptions of and responses to elder abuse? VI. Why and in what way do they respond to elder abuse?
<i>Phase 4:</i>	Fill in gaps of categories identified	Interviews of older people and professionals Focus group with older people	VII. What exactly do we mean by the various elements of the theory and how are they related?

In order to continue to develop concepts emerging from the data, the third phase of data collection further explored the extent to which traditional culture might

have influenced participants' perceptions of and responses to elder abuse; and to understand why they were likely to respond in a given way. In the fourth phase, further interviews were conducted to clarify and fill any gaps between categories and their relationship to each other. To do this I used questions such as "*What exactly do we mean by XX and YY and how are they related?*"

In the first three phases of data collection and analysis, additional sources of data were included as the emerging local literature was updated. Sources included recent government policy documents, '*ad hoc*' discussion in newspapers, or conference proceedings from events that occurred during the study process obtained when I attended various regional and international conferences. All of these were thought necessary as they formed part of the '*bigger picture*' that may well have influenced my own perceptions.

Altogether a total of thirty-six individual interviews (one participant was interviewed twice) and three focus groups involving both older people and health care professionals were conducted between October 2011 and October 2014. This generated thick volumes of data which were analysed as described below.

### **Data management**

Interviews with participants, both individual as well as focus group, field notes and memos were carefully managed and the analysis of these different sources of data made the co-construction of a grounded theory about elder abuse in Hong Kong possible based on the perceptions of community-dwelling older persons and healthcare professionals. In order to allow the detailed analysis to



take place, transcription of the interview data was necessary.

All the interviews were conducted in Chinese and transcribed by the researcher personally. A sample of three interviews were back translated by a qualified and independent translator in order to check on the accuracy of my work. The remaining transcripts were translated into English by me. During the translation, emphasis was placed on conceptual and cultural equivalence, rather than linguistic equivalence as this is recommended as the best way to capture participants' meanings (World Health Organisation 2002).

The whole process was unquestionably time consuming but it was worthwhile because it allowed me to hear and review the voices and intent of the participants; to immerse myself deeper within the data; to get closer to the lived content of the interviews; and to reflect upon the contextual meanings of the participants' words. An additional merit of having a transcribed copy of the interviews was that it allowed consistent immersion in the data collected, permitting deeper insights into the issues discussed to emerge gradually over the course of the interviews. Moreover, full transcription of the interviews also facilitated me returning to earlier interviews as new phenomena were identified. This enhanced the use of both theoretical sampling and constant comparative analysis.

In order to focus my mental energies more on the data than the software, I coded the data manually on hard-copy printouts using coloured pens, scissors and tape. The experience of manipulating the data on paper and writing codes in pencil seemed to give me more control over and ownership of the study. With the use of post-it and index cards and strips of paper, the data could be '*spread*' out and

arranged into appropriate clusters to allow me to see the smaller pieces of the larger puzzle. As such, it gave me a handle on the materials with a sense of the whole, and not just the fragments that could appear on a computer screen.

### **Data analysis**

The goal of data analysis in grounded theory is to generate an emergent set of categories and their properties which fit, work and are relevant when integrated into a theory (Glaser 1978) and which produce a theory that is '*grounded*' or rooted in the original data themselves. In this study, the goal of data analysis was to produce insights and understandings that would be of value to the stakeholders – including the older participants as well as healthcare professionals by developing a substantive theory about elder abuse that fitted with the local context.

The textual data in transcripts or field notes were initially examined inductively using content analysis to generate themes on participants' perceptions of elder abuse. Consistent with grounded theory the aim was to identify the main parameters of the phenomenon and the basic social processes that helped to explain the way the data inter-related. Each transcript was read several times to obtain an overall understanding of the content. I also developed summaries of all interviews outlining the '*flow*' of the story in order to get a sense of how participants described their perceptions of elder abuse and their help-seeking preferences should an abusive situation happen to them. As the study continued, sampling became more purposeful and directed with each additional interview as questions were focused on relevant concepts, as categories were refined (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

Throughout the study, I remained open to new ideas to minimize the potential of forcing concepts into pre-existing frameworks. I finalized links and connections only when they were clearly supported by the data.

Glaser (1978) and Charmaz (1995) identify a two-step coding process in data analysis: line-by-line, open coding which helps to build up substantive codes; and theoretical coding which ‘*conceptualizes how the substantive codes may relate to each other as hypotheses to be integrated into a theory*’ (Charmaz 1978, p.72). How I sought to achieve this is described below.

### ***Initial / open coding – uncovering the categories***

The term ‘*initial coding*’ was referred to as open coding in earlier publications on grounded theory. Coding is considered central to the analysis of qualitative data and Strauss (1987, p.27) makes it clear that “... *any researcher who wishes to become proficient at doing qualitative analysis must learn to code well and easily. The excellence of the research rests in large part on the excellence of the coding.*”

Initial coding is the process of breaking down, scanning, comparing and categorizing data (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The purpose of initial coding is to identify codes in the data and to begin to discover categories and their properties and dimensions. By this process, all the qualitative data are broken down into analytic units by scrutinizing each word, sentence and paragraph. This helps to capture participants’ implied and explicit meanings (see Table 4.2), which in turn helps to ensure a fuller theoretical coverage which is thoroughly grounded in the data (Glaser 1978).

Descriptive codes are used to label units that indicated ideas, events, and actions. I then compared these descriptive codes to identify any similarities or differences in meaning and shared meanings were clustered to illuminate the theoretical properties of each category. Each unit of data was coded into as many codes as necessary in order to maximize the best fit and minimize distortion from predetermined thought / idea or from latent training (Glaser 1978). It was this approach that I adopted.

**Table 4.2 Example of initial open coding from one of the interviews**

<p>Ulla*, a 79-year-old widow in interview was asked the reasons why elder abuse might happen. A statement from her interview and the initial coding of the statement is captured below:</p>	
<i>Interview Statement (Context)</i>	<i>Initial open coding</i>
<p>...[signed] The entire society is different nowadays. We used to have very close neighbourhood, we greeted, chatted and cared for one another, but it is no longer the same now. Every household shuts its door. Nobody chats with anybody else anymore. There is no care or love in the community. The general education has changed and becomes inadequate. We used to be taught in school as well as in family to respect the seniors and be pity for the poor. It seems that the society no longer treasure this ideology. Another reason is that the younger generation is ungrateful to what they have. They don't thank their parents for bringing them to this world. They don't thank their parents for raising them up and sending them to school... they take many things for granted. They only know how to enjoy their life.</p>	<p>Differentiating the society now and then</p> <p>Indicating that current society is now colder and more indifferent</p> <p>Keeping distance from one another</p> <p>Lacking in mutual support in the community</p> <p>Seeing inadequacy in general education</p> <p>Emphasizing the importance of education in upholding traditional values</p> <p>Comparing past and current education on traditional values in terms of respecting seniors</p> <p>Seeing a weakening of filial value as one of the causes of elder abuse</p> <p>Citing examples of declining filial value among younger people</p> <p>Reproving the younger generation's self-focus</p>

\* A pseudonym

The process of initial coding commenced immediately after the first interview and at this stage, coding was largely descriptive and involved attaching labels to isolate instances of phenomena. In order to avoid importing existing theory / concepts into the analysis, I adopted *in vivo* coding initially, based primarily on words or phrases used by the participants in the interviews.

For example, as I coded and recoded differing ‘types’ of elder abuse, their varying dimensions began to emerge as illustrated below:

Category: Physical abuse against older people

Code: NIPPING / PINCHING

Code: PUSHING

Code: FORCING

Category: Verbal abuse against older people

Code: SCORNING

Code: SWEARING

Code: YELLING AT

As the analysis progressed, I sought to identify emerging categories by paying closer attention to participants’ meanings (both implied and explicit). This helped me to identify categories at a higher level of abstraction – analytic categories that facilitated constant comparison. As analysis progressed, I observed patterns in the data as they began to emerge. For example, ‘*being disrespected*’ was perceived by many older participants as a prominent type of elder abuse. Incidents falling within this category included: ignoring their feelings, failing to follow the traditional manner of greeting them, and so on.

Initial coding was considered accomplished after all the data collected were

coded. The next major step in the coding process employed focused or selective coding in which I began to identify frequently appearing codes that could be brought together into a smaller number of more complex categories. This helped to integrate and refine the theory (Charmaz 2003).

***Focused /selective coding – integrating and refining the theory***

Focused coding is the process of integrating and searching for the most frequent or significant codes to develop “*the most salient categories*” in the data and “*requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense*” (Charmaz 2006, pp. 46 and 57). Hence, by reducing the number but enhancing the density of the initial codes, focused codes are more abstract, general, and analytically incisive (Charmaz 1983, Glaser 1978).

When undertaking focused coding, I scanned the data, including the interviews and field notes back and forth, and compared the participants’ thoughts, wordings, actions and their interpretations of what was happening. For instance, in relation to the code of “*respecting older family members*” in a traditional Chinese family, the demand for “*respect*” appeared and re-appeared in various interviews.

Taking the example of initial coding as illustrated in Table 4.2, after comparing and examining the data repeatedly, and trying to think more abstractly about the data I developed the focused codes as shown in Table 4.3.

I viewed and reviewed the existing transcripts and collected new data in subsequent interviews to see how each participant talked about this issue of ‘*respect*’.

**Table 4.3: Example of focused / selective coding of an interview in the study**

<p>Ulla*, a 79-year-old widow in interview was asked the reasons why elder abuse might happen. A statement from her interview and the initial coding of the statement is captured below:</p>	
<i>Interview Statement (Context)</i>	<i>Focused / selective coding</i>
<p>...[signed] The entire society is different nowadays. We used to have very close neighbourhood, we greeted, chatted and cared for one another, but it is no longer the same now. <b>Every household shuts its door.</b> Nobody chats with anybody else anymore. <b>There is no care or love in the community.</b> The <b>general education has changed and becomes inadequate.</b> <b>We used to be taught in school as well as in family to respect the seniors and be pity for the poor.</b> <b>It seems that the society no longer treasure this ideology.</b> Another reason is that the <b>younger generation is ungrateful to what they have.</b> They don't thank their parents for bringing them to this world. They <b>don't thank their parents for raising them up and sending them to school...</b> they take many things for granted. <b>They only know how to enjoy their life.</b></p>	<p><b>Lack of mutual support in the community</b></p> <p><b>Describes the current inadequacy of general education in reinforcing traditional values</b></p> <p><b>Comparing past and current education on traditional values in terms of respecting seniors</b></p> <p><b>Seeing the weakening of filial values as one of the causes of elder abuse</b></p> <p><b>Explaining the rationale and expectation for younger people to respect their parents</b></p> <p><b>Reproving younger generation's self-focus and attitude</b></p>

\* A pseudonym

I compared what each said about their perceptions and experiences and this process helped me to refine the code of '*respecting older persons*'. On the basis of this, I went on to develop one of the key categories in understanding their

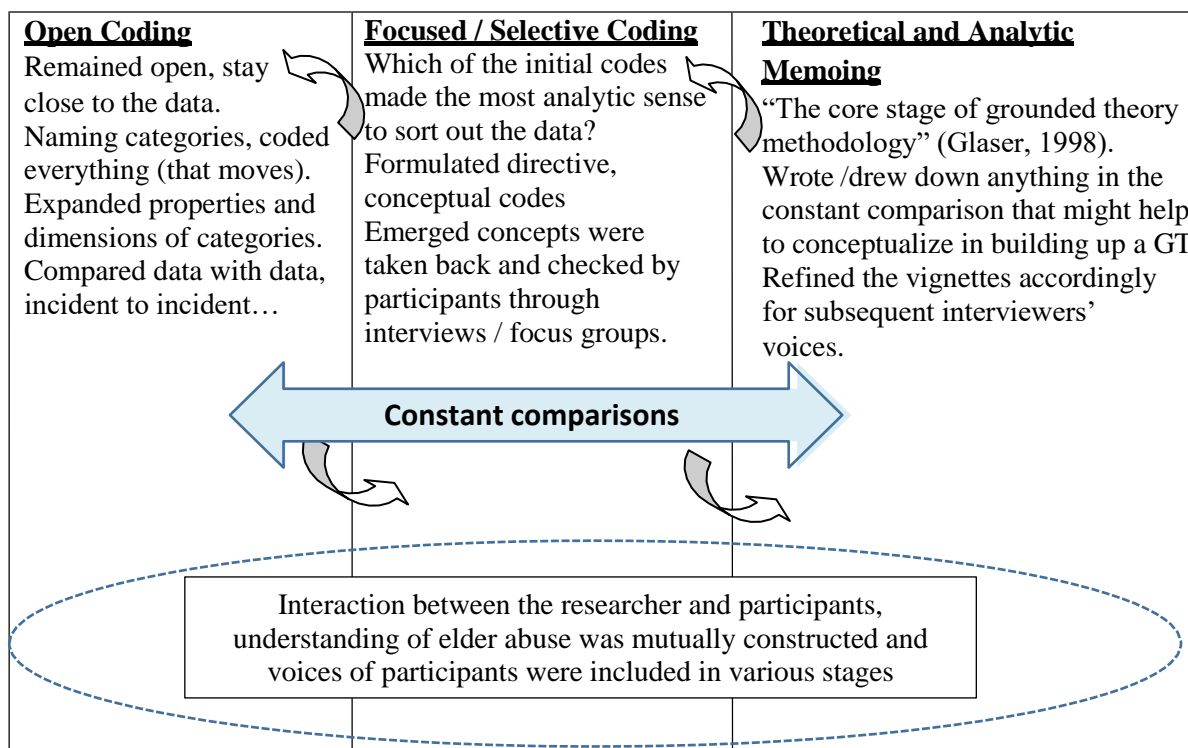
views of elder abuse: '*expectations*' – the older participants were telling me they '*expected*' due respect from their younger family members. And the lack of such respect was perceived as a form of elder abuse. A category is a theme or variable that aims to make sense of what the participant has revealed. Categories explicate ideas, events, or processes in the data (Charmaz 2006, p. 91).

While analyzing the data, I constantly reminded myself to remain focused by asking myself relevant questions such as: *What does the data contribute to the study? What category does this incident indicate? What property of a category, of what part of the emerging theory does this incident point to? What is actually happening in the data?* (Glaser 1978). By keeping these questions in mind while analyzing the data, I was enabled to stay on track and to focus on patterns in the codes, and to move (slowly) to conceptual ideas / concepts from the descriptions of incidents (Figure 4.1).

The successful interplay of data collection and analysis requires a set of concurrent processes, so initial impressions from the interview were documented immediately afterwards and any new or emergent themes added to subsequent interviews. During the process of analysis, the principles of constant comparison were applied whereby interviews were compared with interviews, and participant with participant in an interactive and dialectic fashion.



**Figure 4.1 Process of data collection interplaying with data analysis in the co-construction of a theory on elder abuse**



At the start, I thought analysis of the data would be quite straightforward and would be achieved relatively quickly. But when I looked at the data I found myself somehow frozen and I asked myself ‘Code what?’ In searching for an appropriate way to move forward, I noted Glaser’s (1978) suggestion that coding with gerunds helps researchers to detect processes in the data; something reinforced by Charmaz (2006) who states that researchers “gain a strong sense of action and sequence with gerunds”. I found Morse and Richard’s (2007) humorous advice for analytic work lively and useful: “If it moves, code it” (p.146). And so I did.

At the heart of a grounded theory lies the ‘core category’. In identifying the core category, Strauss’ (1987, cited in Strauss and Corbin 1998) six criteria were adopted. These are (1) the core category should relate to all other major categories; (2) it appears frequently in the data; (3) there is logic and consistency

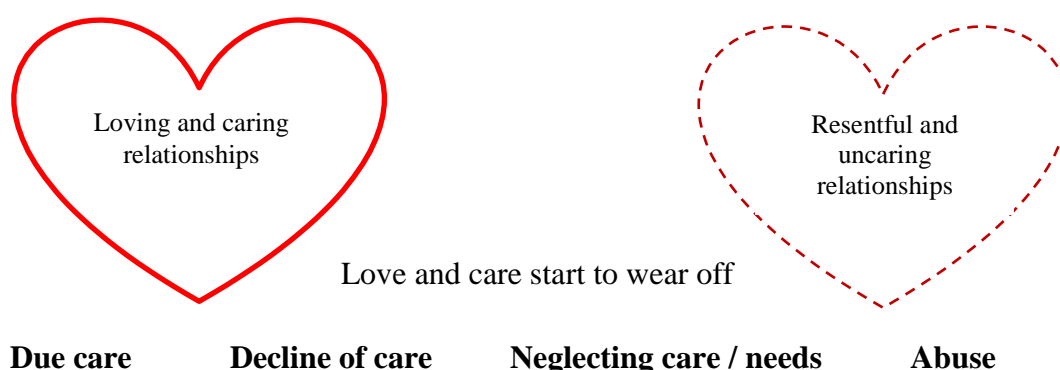
in the explanation developed along the pathway in relating it to other categories; (4) the phrase / concept used to describe the core category is sufficiently abstract; (5) as the concept is refined the theory grows in depth as well as in its explanatory power; and (6) the concept should be sustainable in face of changing conditions, albeit the way in which the phenomenon is expressed might appear somewhat different.

During the process of identifying the core category, I tried to think multi-dimensionally about the emerging concepts. To facilitate this progressive understanding and analysis of the data, techniques such as diagramming, tabling and memoing were employed in the process.

### ***Diagramming and tabling***

Drawing diagrams was an analytic tool that facilitated me moving descriptive details to a more abstract level of thinking. Diagramming and tabling enabled me to immerse myself in the data and eventually fostered insights and a greater depth of understanding (see Appendix 11). For example, one of the diagrams I drew was concerned with a potential continuum of care for older people. As the care and love declined over time (for whatever reason), elder abuse might occur at the other the end of the continuum (see Figure 4.2). This idea began to emerge from the data after the initial 4-5 individual interviews. This diagram helped to focus my thinking about how a possible decline in family relationships might potentially sow the seeds of later abuse.

**Figure 4.2 Diagram illustrating a possible elder care continuum ending with elder abuse**



Diagramming also facilitated the exploration of relationships between categories, something that was also aided by the process of memoing (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

### ***Memoing***

Memos aid theorizing about codes and their relationships, as they strike the analyst while coding (Glaser 1978) and they are an important part of theory development. According to Glaser (1978) memos should:

- assist the researcher to think more clearly about and engage more fully with the data,
- facilitate free association of ideas and reflection, and
- foster the development of ideas and insights in the data.

Birks et al. (2008) provide a useful acronym to help remember the overall purpose of memo writing. It should assist in:

- **M**ap research activities (record the decision-making processes of research design and implementation as an audit trail);
- **E**xtract meaning from the data (explore meaning from the stakeholders' perspectives linking analysis and interpretation with theory creation);

- **M**aintain momentum (facilitate reflexivity throughout the evolutionary journey of the study); and
- **O**pen communication (permit comment and input from others involved in or overseeing the study).

Three types of memos were used during the study. These were analytical, operational and theoretical memos. With *analytical memos*, for instance, I recorded relevant decisions concerning themes and categories as they developed and continued to emerge and evolve as the study progressed. This allowed me to keep a record of the progressive integration of higher and lower-level categories. *Operational memos* comprised notes on theoretical sampling and the topics to be explored in subsequent interviews as the theory emerged from the data. *Theoretical memos* documented my thoughts, the development of the categories and their properties and dimensions, and the relationships between categories.

In addition to these three types of memo, other forms of documentation were also used to facilitate data analysis. For example, learning from Emerson et al.'s (2011) explanation of writing field notes, my set of field notes (Appendix 12) were completed after each interview and as part of the initial coding. These contained a brief description of the interview, my overall impressions and observations of the interview and potential questions to be followed in subsequent interviews. A reflexive journal was maintained in a file separate from the interview content and coding. This recorded my thoughts and feelings about the research process such as how I might be influencing interpretation of data based on my personal and professional background and knowledge of the

literature.

### ***Paying attention to participants' language***

During the process of analysis it was important to pay attention to participants' use of language, particularly in the initial coding where their words were used to develop early codes wherever possible. Attention to language helps to illuminate how individuals organize, convey meaning, and express their feelings and experiences (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). For example, one participant described how she felt when her daughter-in-law turned a '*cold shoulder*' to her and talked to her using demeaning language whenever the son was not around. The participant described the situation as being almost like a '*needle hidden in cotton*'. This metaphor stimulated theoretical ideas and analytic thinking about how pained an older person might feel when faced with seemingly subtle abusive situations. Seeking to make sense of participants' metaphorical expressions not only assisted in making theoretical comparisons, but also enabled development of dimensions and/or ranges of category properties, leading to further detail and understanding of what was being described.

For example, as noted above analysis of the data showed that older participants often talked about their need for respect from younger family members. Some even pointed out that being disrespected was a serious insult and made them feel worthless; hence, it was considered as a severe form of elder abuse. Whilst this was a common idea explicitly expressed by a number of older participants, analysis and comparison of the data revealed that the nature of '*disrespect*' varied and included actions ranging from not greeting older family members in a proper manner to neglecting their needs, whether intentionally or

unintentionally.

As will be appreciated, the process of data collection and analysis was lengthy and complex but eventually a decision has to be made about when to stop. It is to this area that attention is now turned.

### ***Attaining theoretical saturation***

Traditionally the criterion for deciding when to stop sampling in grounded theory is when theoretical saturation is attained. Charmaz (2006) suggests that: “*categories are saturated when gathering fresh data, no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of these core theoretical categories*” (p.113). Glaser (2001) provides another view on the concept of theoretical saturation particularly for the purpose of grounded theory by explaining that:

*Saturation is not seeing the same pattern over and over again. It is the conceptualization of comparisons of these incidents which yield different properties of the pattern, until no new properties of the pattern emerge. This yields the conceptual density that when integrated into hypotheses make up the body of the generated grounded theory with theoretical completeness. (p.191)*

Grounded theorists place emphasis on the quality of the conceptual analysis and the ability of a grounded theory to provide the best possible explanation of the phenomenon under study (Charmaz 2003, p.327). Hence, it is the adequacy of the theoretical concept and not the actual number of participants that matters, when it comes to the question of saturation. In this study, the decision that

theoretical saturation had been attained was informed by the following criteria outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998). First, when no new relevant data emerged regarding a category. Second, categories were well developed in terms of their properties and dimensions demonstrating variation. And finally, relationships among categories were well established and validated. In essence, I decided that theoretical saturation had been achieved when it appeared that the research questions had been adequately answered and integrated into a theory. In other words, a '*best fit*' solution seemed to emerge (Morse and Field 1995).

### ***Conceptualization, theorizing and the process of co-construction***

Theorizing is the systematic selection and '*fitting*' of alternative models to the data (Morse and Field 1995) involving the construction of alternative explanations and holding these against the data until the best fit that explains the phenomenon under study most simply is obtained. In order to achieve this, researchers must move beyond the coding stage of analysis and raise categories to concepts and eventually identify the core category.

As will be described in detail in the findings chapters the core category that emerged in this study was that of '*evaluating*' which captures the participants attempts to locate the phenomenon of elder abuse with reference to their '*expectations*', especially those regarding filial piety. This is a complex undertaking that reflects the dynamic and multi-layered ways by which both older people and professionals sought to understand what constitutes Elder Abuse amongst Chinese older people in Hong Kong. Underpinning '*Evaluating*' were a range of closely associated processes that will be considered in-depth in the forthcoming chapters.

As was noted earlier in traditional grounded theory, especially the approach advocated by Glaser (1978), the process of analysis and theorizing is the sole preserve of the researcher with participants' role being confined largely to providing data, with the researcher being seen as a '*neutral*' entity who limits his/her interactions to those necessary for the collection of data. But, in constructivist studies the importance of the interactions between researchers and participants is fully recognized, with both being seen to play an active role in the process of data collection and, ideally, analysis.

This however, particularly the latter aspect, is often difficult to realise in practice. In order to achieve this fully it is usually necessary to have multiple contact with participants over time to allow them to engage fully with the process of analysis. The time constraints placed on my study meant that this was not possible and therefore a compromise had to be reached that allowed participants to play as full a part as possible within the constraints of a single contact. A number of tactics were adopted to try and achieve this.

These ranged from the way in which I sought to establish rapport with the participants and to put them at ease when discussing what, for many, would be a sensitive topic, through to the way that I undertook the interview and the efforts I made to ensure that emerging ideas were incorporated into subsequent interviews so that the focus of our conversations grew in an incremental fashion. It was also important, especially in a constructivist study, that any theory that is developed '*speaks*' to the participants in a language that they can relate to. The challenge for the researcher is how to make abstract ideas that may be full of



ambiguity and uncertainty, as accessible as possible to as wide an audience as possible. As noted above the use of participants' own language and phrases was an important part of this, as were attempts to engage the participants in a process of co-construction as outlined below.

The most obvious manifestation of this was in the way that the vignettes evolved over time with input from the participants helping me to revise and refine the vignettes. This exchange of ideas not only enhanced my understanding of the participants' perspectives but also helped to ensure that the vignettes properly reflected key dimensions of elder abuse and help-seeking behaviours as defined by the participants.

Ideas that emerged from the use of the vignettes were then incorporated in future interviews and focus groups for the comments and reflections of participants.

Furthermore, as the '*theory*' began to emerge, elements of it were '*shared*' with future participants towards the end of their interviews and their views on the categories and their relationships sought. In this way participants in the study, both the older people and the professionals, were actively engaged, through interactive dialogic relations, as important stakeholders in the co-construction of a culturally sensitive and locally appropriate theory about elder abuse in their context. The extent to which this can be said to have fully engaged with participants is considered in greater detail in the discussion chapter.

Having considered the way in which the study was '*enacted*', attention is now turned to ethical issues.

#### **4.7 Ethical considerations**

At the beginning of the study in 2011, ethical approvals from the Department of Research Committee School of Nursing, University of Hong Kong and the School of Nursing and Midwifery, University of Sheffield, UK, were obtained as required.

This section provides greater detail on how ethical considerations were carefully embraced in the study. Given that the study topic was a sensitive one and the fact that the potential participants would include vulnerable older people, special attention was warranted. For example, at the beginning of the study, I worried about issues such as obtaining informed consent, building rapport and providing ethical emotional support if needed during interviews. As a matter of fact, in the local cultural context, asking older persons to sign the consent form could be too alarming to them. I will deal with each of these ethical issues in turn in the following paragraphs.

##### ***Plans for obtaining informed consent***

Measures were taken at various stages of the study to ensure ethical accountability. The human rights of the participants were fully considered and duly respected. With the help of the Centres' staff / supervisors, potential participants were identified based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria mentioned above and an initial briefing of the study provided first to staff of Centres and to individuals identified as interested in the study.

During recruitment of participants, an explanation of the study was provided to the level of understanding of the participants. Given that the potential

participants were older persons, who might be considered more vulnerable, therefore care was taken to ensure that they should not have a sense that he/she might be ‘obliged’ to participate in the study, though the basic principle applies to all ages regardless of status. When they showed an interest in participating, the content of the information sheet (Appendix 7 or 8 as appropriate) was given or read out to them prior to the subsequent steps of formal recruitment.

Individuals were told that they might stop the interview at any time, withdraw or refuse to answer any questions without any effect on their rights or any services they might receive. Having been given all the relevant information supplemented by the information sheets, people were then given a copy of the informed consent form (Appendix 9-Chinese version or 10-English version) that included statements of their rights and the name and contact number of a person if they had any questions about the study. All participants received a copy of their signed consent form. Since the interviews were audiotaped, a prior consent for the use of such technique from each participant was obtained as part of the consent process. No participants refused audio-recording.

At this stage, adequate time was provided for the potential participants to consider whether or not to participate. A ‘cooling off’ period, up to about 24 hours was deliberately suggested to potential participants for them to consider the information they had received and to change their mind, if so wished, before embarking on participation in the study. It was emphasized that each participant was under no duress at all. In other words, they were free to decline or refuse to participate without any consequences or impact.

The reason for not following the 24-hour ‘cooling off’ policy strictly was

because many of these potential participants were actually approached and briefed by the Centre staff of this study ahead of time. Hence, if they showed full understanding of the study's objectives and preferred to have the interview straight right after the discussion, their choice was duly respected. As it turned out, only a couple of potential older participants preferred to have the interview at some other time. The majority of them chose to be interviewed soon after the explanation.

As a part of the informed consent process, participants' consent (for both individual interviews and focus group) was also obtained to gain their demographic data (Appendix 5 for older participants, and 6 for professional participants). And during the interview and whenever necessary, the researcher would repeat the purpose and potential use of the data collected thoroughly.

#### ***Steps to ensure confidentiality and data storage security***

Before agreeing to participate, potential participants were told that participation in the study was on a voluntary basis and given the opportunity to raise any query. They were assured of anonymity, and asked to agree that some of their views might be used in my study thesis, journal articles or conference presentations; although their names would not be associated with any publication and any identifying features would be removed prior to the submission of the thesis or any publication.

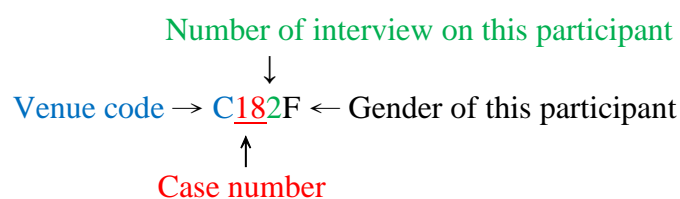
During the study, as far as practically possible, confidentiality and secure storage of the information and data of this study were assured throughout the research process, including data analysis (for discussion about the limits to

confidentiality, see section below on potential risks). And participants were informed about these measures as part of the information provided during the consent process. The measures taken were as follows. The audiotapes and recordings of interviews were kept in a locked cabinet inside a locked office which was strictly limited to the researcher only. All identifying information was removed from the tapes during the transcription process. Anonymity was maintained in three ways.

Firstly, the entire transcript was coded, and the informed consent forms were stored separately from the data, including the transcripts and the recordings. Specific codes were assigned to each participant and interview. The codes were used for identification instead of their names and the latter were not included in any transcript or document.

Secondly, all the names were initially replaced by a specially designed case number (Figure 4.3) in the transcripts when they were mentioned in the interviews. Such a system provided me with a clear idea regarding the total number interviewed; the whereabouts the interview took place and gender of the participants. To maintain a sense of humanity, pseudonym were assigned to each case so that in this thesis, the individual's voice was from a human, and not from an artificial number.

**Figure 4.3 Example of specially designed case number for each interview**



Finally, names of the participants were not included in the reporting and

dissemination of the findings. Only aggregated data would be reported and if a participant needed to be referred to, pseudonyms would be used. All the data would be destroyed two years after the completion of this study, or as subjected to otherwise specific requirements of the University policy. It must be admitted that confidentiality was almost impossible in focus group discussions due to the nature of the method.

The researcher set the ground rules at the beginning of focus group to request participants' respect of each other's confidentiality. However, it was impossible to guarantee focus group participants' absolute confidentiality because the researcher had no control over the participants after they left the session. Therefore, focus group participants were reminded to only talk about matters they were comfortable discussing, in the knowledge that it might not be kept strictly confidential by the participants beyond the session.

***Estimation of potential risks or distress and plans to deal with them***

Prior to the completion of consent process and also at the outset of an interview, the researcher made it clear (calmly and politely) to the participant that it was the researcher's ethical obligation to report cases of elder abuse if a situation of abuse was disclosed during an interview. This could include situations of abuse or harm to either the participant or to another person. The participant was also informed that this might include situations where his/her wishes would be overridden in making such a report. But the individual's consent would be sought first prior to any referral being made and they would be informed if referral without their consent would occur should the situation called for this.

Of the twenty-seven participants, no situation arose which call for such a

referral. As recalled from my field observation notes, three of the participants got slightly emotional during the interviews when they mentioned that their adult children failed to take them to the doctors when he or she was ill and needed help. They resumed their calmness after a brief break and all were willing to continue with their interviews.

The researcher did plan ahead of time. Should any of the participants become distressed during the interview, their feelings would be fully acknowledged, their emotional needs be met as far as possible, and psychological support be provided as required. These included but not limited to being there for the entire time when the older participant was still emotional, or help sought from the Centre staff who were familiar with the older participant's situation. The researcher also had prior communications with the Centres' supervisors and was acquainted with the referral procedures that existed in relation to any report of abuse and/or for support, if situations called for this type of response.

During data collection, there was a potential stigma, which participants in this study might face. The topic itself (elder abuse) is a sensitive issue, which in turn might evoke emotional disturbances or upset. In exploring some issues that were more sensitive, such as existential concerns, or relationships with spouse or other family members, the researcher attempted to ask superficial questions first and then moved to use of probing (with the aid of vignettes, Appendix 1 and 2) when the participants talked about related issues. However, when the participant avoided discussing some issues after raising a few superficial questions at different times during the interview, the researcher stopped exploring those issues unless the participant initiated and brought the researcher back to it.

Throughout the entire process, participants were not seen merely as a means to

complete the study, but as an end in co-constructing a meaningful substantive theory, which it was hoped would be beneficial to them too and they were made aware of this at the very start. In this connection, an information sheet (Appendix 13) was provided to all older participants about sources of support and help that might be available should they wish to access these. That information was written in Chinese for their ease of reference and use if needed.

As a strategy to deal with these sensitive issues, vignettes were used in all interviews. It was believed that the use of vignettes would provide an unthreatening approach for the older participants, and that the participants would feel less intimidated when they revealed their feelings, beliefs and perspectives about elder abuse (Jenkins 2010). Potential participants were also informed that if they chose to stop an interview, any data collected up until that point would not be included in the study if they wished such data withdrawal to happen.

As stated above, it was emphasized to them that they had full right to withdraw at any time with no consequence or effect on them. That meant they had free choice to decide on this matter. Only one out of the 27 older participants made such request on her own accord in the middle of her interview, and this was complied with, and the interview was not included in the study.

As the only *human instrument* who went into the field to conduct interviews and focus groups on this particular area of elder abuse, I must admit that there were times when I was exposed to upsetting scenarios. This inevitably had an emotional impact on me. Whilst I could discuss such feelings with my supervisors this was a less than perfect mechanism given that we met only infrequently and mostly by



remote means. As supportive as my supervisors were, I was fortunate to have more immediate support from colleagues within the Centre for Gerontological Nursing in the School of my affiliation. They were aware that I was completing my PhD on elder abuse and whilst being sensitive to issues of confidentiality and anonymity, I was able to explore the emotional impact of my study informally, as and when the need arose.

Having considered the ethical dimensions of the study attention is now turned to how the quality of the study was judged.

#### **4.8 Ensuring the ‘Quality’ of the study**

Following an extensive literature review, Murphy et al. (1998) concluded that there is a lack of consensus about how best to ensure the rigour of a study when using qualitative approaches, including grounded theory and constructivist work. Indeed there are several schools of thought that have somewhat different approaches to the issue of rigour in grounded theory/constructivist studies and the three major ones summarised in Table 4.4.

For instance, Glaser (1978) advocated the criteria of fit, work, relevance and modifiability in determining the quality of a grounded theory. From a constructivist viewpoint Guba and Lincoln (1989) proposed criteria designed to equate to the positivist standards of reliability and validity by emphasizing four assessment criteria, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, something expanded upon by Rodwell (1998).

Combining grounded theory with constructivism, Charmaz (2006) argues that the criteria for evaluating research depends on “*who forms them and what purposes he or she invokes*” (2006, p.182). Charmaz (2006) proposes four key

criteria for evaluating a more interpretive and constructivist grounded theory design, namely: credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness. These are defined as outlined in the table above. It is these criteria that will be applied in this study and the extent to which they can be considered to have been met will be considered in the discussion.

**Table 4.4 A summary of different criteria for quality evaluation in grounded theory studies**

<b>Chief advocate</b>	<b>Assessment Criteria</b>	<b>Key Concerns</b>
<b>Glaser (1978)</b> <b>Glaser and Strauss (1967)</b>	<b>Fit</b>	Concerning the matter of correspondence to facts in the social reality. This requires that categories should emerge from data and should not be influenced by a pre-established theoretical perspective.
	<b>Work</b>	Theories should have a function by providing predictions, explanations and interpretations of what was going on in the area under study.
	<b>Relevance</b>	Theories should be relevant to what was going on in the area it claimed to explain by focusing on the emerging core problems and processes.
	<b>Modifiability</b>	A grounded theory should be capable of going through changes when new data emerge, generating qualifications to the theory.
<b>Guba and Lincoln (1989)</b> <b>[Similar to that of Rodwell (1998)]</b>	<b>Credibility</b>	Resembles internal validity – accuracy of the process and product.
	<b>Transferability</b>	Refers to the external validity of the findings – the degree to which other researchers can apply the findings of a study to their own.
	<b>Dependability</b>	Refers to reliability of the findings – reflecting the process of the theory development was logically induced from the data collected.
	<b>Confirmability</b>	Refers to the internal coherence of the data in relation to the findings, interpretations, and recommendations (Denzin and Lincoln 1994).
<b>Charmaz, K (2006)</b>	<b>Credibility</b>	There are strong logical links between the gathered data which are sufficient to merit the study claims.
	<b>Originality</b>	The categories are fresh and capable of offering new insights. The grounded theory constructed challenges, extends, or refines current ideas, concepts and practices
	<b>Resonance</b>	The categories generated portray the fullness of the studied experience and the theory constructed makes sense to the participants who share their circumstances.
	<b>Usefulness</b>	The analysis offers interpretations that people can use in their everyday worlds. The analysis can spark further research in other substantive areas.

***Authenticity criteria for constructivist research***

In addition to the above criteria there was also a need to consider the extent to which the study met the criteria for authenticity suggested for constructivist studies. Guba and Lincoln (1989), originally proposed five criteria by which to judge the authenticity of constructivist work, these were: fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity and tactical authenticity.

In seeking to make these rather abstract terms more accessible to a wider audience Nolan et al. (2003) relabeled them as follows: equal access, enhanced awareness of the position of self, enhanced awareness of the position of others, encouraging action by providing a rationale and impetus for change and encouraging action by providing the means to achieve change. They argued that the extent to which these criteria were applied and met at various stages of the research process should be made clear.

**Table 4.5 Application of Nolan et al. (2003) criteria in the present study**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Planning</b>	<b>Process</b>	<b>Product</b>
<b>Equal access</b>	Ensure the voices of all the major stakeholders heard	√	√	√
<b>Enhanced awareness of self</b>	Provide participants with new insights to their own situation		√	√
<b>Enhanced awareness of Others</b>	Help participants to better understand the situation of other stakeholders		√	√
<b>Encouraging Action</b>	Identify and promote changes		√	√
<b>Enabling action</b>	Facilitate and/or empower change		√	√

(Modified from Nolan et al. 2003)

Table 4.5 outlines this briefly with respect to the present study. These steps were adopted and followed in this study and the extent to which they were met will also be considered more fully later in the ‘discussion’ chapter as part of a reflexive account of my research journey.

### ***Reflexivity and constructivist grounded theory***

As will be argued below reflexivity is increasingly considered to be an essential element of grounded theory work. The description of my motivation in undertaking this study and the account of the role that my own understandings took in shaping the direction of the study has already been considered. Below I expand upon recent discussions about the role of reflexivity within grounded theory.

Whilst reflexivity has been a key part of qualitative research for many years, discussion as to its role in grounded theory is a far more recent phenomenon (Gentles et al. 2014, Leonard and McAdam 2001, Ramalho et al. 2015). In an early reflection on the issue Leonard and McAdam (2001) contended that up until that time researchers using grounded theory had paid scant attention to the value of adding a reflexive account to their work, and such an element was often seen as unnecessary.

Over a decade later Gentles et al. (2014) undertook a review of the use of reflexivity in grounded theory and concluded that whilst it was by then the subject of greater debate, nevertheless many still paid it lip service, a conclusion with which other authors concurred (Ramalho et al. 2015). In order to address what was seen as a deficit of many qualitative studies, Gentles et al. (2014)

argued that the use of reflexivity should be an explicit inclusion in constructivist studies so as to make the influence of the researcher as transparent as possible. In order to do this, they proposed a series of questions that any author needs to address and it is their work, augmented by that of Ramalho et al. (2015), that I used to inform my own approach to reflexivity.

In making clear what they mean by reflexivity Gentles et al. (2014) provide the following broad definition, based on their review of the literature and suggest that reflexivity '*most often refers to the generalised picture in which researchers strive to make their influence on the research explicit*' (Gentles et al. 2014, p.1). They argue that there is a need for a more specific framework within which to consider reflexivity in constructivist grounded theory and provide a series of questions/issues that the researcher needs to address. I outline these below, with one addition provided by the writings of Ramalho et al. (2015). In my section on reflexivity to date and that to be included in the discussion, I therefore intend to consider the following issues.

- Any influence that I may have had on the research design and decisions about which questions to ask. This will include any pre-existing knowledge / concepts that I might have brought into the study, including the role played by the literature (Ramalho et al. 2015). These issues have already been largely addressed in the introductory section and the literature review chapter.
- The nature of my interactions with the participants to include issues such as: any '*power*' that the participants might have perceived I had; how I made contact with the participants and the way in which I presented myself to them; the extent to which I was able to involve the participants

as ‘partners’ in the study. These issues have been briefly addressed above and are discussed further in the following chapters.

- Any influence I might have exerted on the ways in which data were collected and analysed. For Gentles et al. (2014) and Ramalho et al. (2015) the processes that underpin grounded theory analysis, such as constant comparison and memo writing, ensure an element of reflection on the part of the researcher, but I have sought in this chapter to make this as explicit as possible.
- Any influence I may have had on the writing and reporting of the study; the effects that undertaking the study had on me. Both of these issues will be addressed later.
- In addition to the above, Ramalho et al. (2015) make the telling point that any study undertaken by a doctoral student also needs to reflect on the part played by their supervisors. For these authors, the supervisory relationship provides the primary ‘*terrain of reflexivity*’.

A number of the above points have already been considered and others will be attended to at the relevant points in the thesis.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

In this study, Charmaz’s (2005, 2006) constructivist version of the grounded theory approach has been adopted. The methods applied in the study in terms of theoretical sampling, data collection and constant comparative analysis have been described. With the application of the methods explained in this chapter, the main categories that emerged from the data and the developing ‘*theory*’ will be elaborated in chapters 5-7.

## CHAPTER 5

### OLDER PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF, AND RESPONSES TO ELDER ABUSE

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#### 5.1 Introduction

This study aimed to explore the meaning of, and responses to elder abuse, amongst a group of community-dwelling older people and the relevant health and social care professionals who might address such an issue. As described in Chapter 4 [methodology], the older participants took part in this study did not actually have to have experienced elder abuse themselves to be included. But as illustrated below, seven of the 27 participants who took part in the individual interviews considered themselves to have been victims of elder abuse, and 11 said that they were aware of what they believed to be incidences of potential abuse amongst older people that they knew. In this chapter, the views of these older participants on what constitutes elder abuse from their perspectives will be explored and reported in detail.

There are four main sections in this chapter. **First**, I will present the demographic characteristics of the participants to highlight their personal situation. The **second** section reports their views on what constitutes elder abuse. As well as outlining differing types of abuse, this section will start to explore the role played by a number of factors, including the intent behind a behaviour and the influence of traditional Chinese culture, especially filial piety, on shaping perceptions of elder abuse. The dynamic relationship between peoples' expectations and how they evaluate actions that might be potentially abusive will be explored in the **third** section of the chapter. This highlights a complex set of processes by which the older participants not only determined whether certain behaviours might be abusive or not but also how they often

sought to either '*explain/excuse*' or '*endure*' such behaviours rather than deciding to '*expose*' the abuse to others. The **final** section of the chapter will consider the participants potential help-seeking behaviours. I begin with the profiles of the participants.

## **5.2 Characteristics of the older participants**

### **5.2.1 Older participants for individual interview**

A total of twenty-seven community-dwelling older persons participated in the interview phase of the study (Table 5.1 displays the sample characteristics). Their ages ranged from 65 – 90 years old with seven being male with a mean age of 79.9 years and twenty were female with a mean age of 75.1 years. This sample is not directly comparable with the Hong Kong population as a whole where females are on average older than males (Census and Statistics Department Hong Kong 2015). Eleven of the older people were still married at the time of the interview, and sixteen were divorced, widowed or single. Five of the participants lived alone and another five with a domestic servant only. The remaining participants lived with family members (nine with spouses/children, four with a spouse alone and four with children alone).

Most of the older participants reported that they had received only a primary level of education or less. This reflects the experiences of this generation for whom the opportunities for education were relatively underdeveloped compared with the situation today (Census and Statistics Department Hong Kong 2015). The majority reported a monthly income of around HK\$1000-5000 (£80-400). This is broadly comparable to the general situation in Hong Kong, where the median monthly domestic household income of older persons is around



HK\$3500 (£290) as reported by the Census and Statistics Department (2015).

**Table 5.1 Demographics of the 27 older participants for individual interviews**

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Estimated Percent</i>
<b>Age</b>		
65-70	6	22%
71-80	12	45%
81-90	9	33%
Total	27	100%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female (Mean age=75.1 Range 65-90)	21	78%
Male (Mean age=79.9 Range 72-90)	6	22%
<b>Education</b>		
No formal education	13	48%
Primary level	10	37%
Secondary level	4	15%
<b>Income [monthly]</b>		
Less than 1000 (<£106)	1	4%
1000 – 2999 (£106-317)	10	37%
3000 – 4999 (£107-528)	11	41%
5000 or over (>£529)	5	18%
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Still married	11	41%
Widowed	12	45%
Divorced	2	7%
Single	2	7%
<b>Religious Belief</b>		
Buddhism	8	30%
Christianity	2	7%
Atheist	17	63%
<b>Living Arrangement</b>		
Live alone	5	19%
Live with spouse and children	9	33%
Live with spouse only	4	15%
Live with children only	4	15%
Live with domestic helper only	5	19%
<b>Personal experience of elder abuse</b>		
Self-perceived victims	7	26%
Had witnessed abusive behaviours	9	33%
Self-perceived non-victims	11	41%

### **5.2.2 Characteristics of the focus group participants**

In addition to individual interviews, three focus groups were conducted with different groups of people between November 2011 and April 2014. These participants did not take part in the individual interviews and the groups comprised four community-based nurses; five community-based social workers; and a group of eight community-dwelling older people. The latter group included six females and two males, aged from 68 – 90 years old. Three of these had received no formal education, three had primary level education and two were educated to secondary level. All were retired except for one female who was still working as a security guard in a public estate at the time of focus group discussion. Their current monthly income ranged from HK\$1000-12000 (about £80-935). Four of the participants lived alone, two with relatives (nieces), one with a spouse only and one with a domestic helper only.

Having considered the characteristics of the sample, the following section presents the older participants' perceptions of what constituted elder abuse.

### **5.3 Older participants' perceptions of elder abuse**

In this section, older participants' views regarding “*what constitutes elder abuse from the perspectives of community-dwelling older people living in Hong Kong?*” are reported. The focus here is on how participants viewed elder abuse, with the significant influence of culture, especially filial piety being considered in more detail later. As these perceptions often shaped their subsequent responses to elder abuse, how they viewed what constitutes elder abuse is of significance.

As the study unfolded it was clear that how elder abuse was perceived, was

influenced by a complex array of factors and consequently a simple definition of elder abuse did not emerge. Given the lack of clarity regarding a definition reported in the literature, this was not surprising. For the older people in the study it was not simply a matter of what was ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ but the context and intent of an act played a central role in determining whether it was considered abusive or not, as the quote below illustrates:

*‘Oh, this is not easy to explain (what is elder abuse)... It is more than saying who is right or who is wrong and who is doing what... It is complex and difficult to say in simple terms for sure [what elder abuse is]. Different cases may have very different contexts that make it abusive or not’  
[Lily, 72 years old]*

It became clear that rather than a particular act being seen as automatically abusive or not it was often the intent behind the act and how participants evaluated it that were the primary considerations in determining whether it was seen as abuse. This is explored below.

### **5.3.1 The issue of ‘intent’**

It was when considering the vignettes that the importance of intent became most apparent. When listening to my older participants it was clear that they did not judge a particular scenario abusive or not merely based solely on what had been done. Rather they would interpret any act in the context in which it occurred and seek to understand the intent behind the act itself and to ‘evaluate’ the act against ‘expectations’ they held about acceptable behaviour. This process of ‘evaluating’ is therefore of major importance. In order to aid this process they frequently asked for clarification on a number of points about the scenario presented in the vignettes or made their own judgement about the intent/purpose

of an act. For instance, in the scenario where adult children stopped their older parents from going out for morning exercise, participants were reluctant to see the intent as being to deliberately reduce the older persons' free will but rather tried to attribute the act to the children's desire to ensure their parents' safety. The action was therefore seen to be underpinned by good intentions or, as described below, made with a *'kind heart'*:

*'...this is of course not elder abuse at all. The two elder parents may find it a bit boring having to stay at home. But this is done merely for their safety. Their children are doing the right thing by keeping them safe, bless their kind heart'. [Grace, 86 years old]*

Similar considerations were seen to apply in the scenario where the daughter locked her forgetful father out of the house while she was away at work. This vignette was provided by a social worker who clearly saw it as an incidence of abuse, but some older participants were not so certain and viewed it as a way of the daughter limiting the possibility of household accidents or injury to the older person. This provided an early indication of potential differences in perceptions between older people and professionals:

*'This is hard to say [if it is abuse or not]. Leaving her older father outdoors for the whole day is really not so good, but maybe she has a good reason or purpose doing so, so that he would not hurt himself while left alone at home...'*  
*[Bonnie, 65 years old, bullied by her neighbour]*

The question of intent arose quite early in the study and this suggested from the outset that the issue of how abuse was perceived was likely to be complex. The full complexity of this will become clear later and attention is now turned to the

type of acts that were viewed as abusive (or potentially so) by the older participants.

The most obvious and frequently cited form of abuse related to physical acts against the older person. Here the issue of intent did not seem as important; rather it was clear that physical assault was usually seen as abuse no matter what the circumstances.

### **5.3.2 Physical assault**

Physical assault and various acts of violence/aggression against older people were the usual starting points in our discussions as to what constituted elder abuse during most of the interviews, with hitting / beating up the older person being commonly cited as an example. As the quote below makes clear the question of intent does not come into play here, but if an act was seen as an example of gross disrespect this seemed to add an additional layer of abuse over and above the physical act itself. The issue of 'disrespecting' elders in various ways arose at numerous points and for many participants was central to their understanding of elder abuse:

*'...a typical one [elder abuse] must be hitting. Children hit older parents... it is elder abuse no matter what excuse the abuser might have. It is due to, like I said, lack of respect and despising older persons. If there remains any trace of respect for older parent, a [adult] child would never ever raise a hand to his old parent.'* [Mark, 82 years)

Similar strongly voiced opinions were apparent in response to the vignette in which an adult son slapped his older parent while also demanding money to pay for his gambling debts:

*'This is so disgraceful and totally unacceptable! How dare a son hit his own mother! This is not only an ordinary elder abuse case; it is a very serious crime...' [Nancy, 90 years old]*

As noted above for the older participants the physical assault itself was not the sole consideration and being hit by a member of your family added a further layer of pain at a psychological level, being perceived as *'disgraceful'* and *'not ordinary elder abuse'*. Such an act was contrary to the accepted and valued position that an older adult should hold within the family. To illustrate this point some participants drew distinctions between physical punishment given to children and the abuse of an older family member:

*'... punishing their [children's] wrong behaviour using some reasonable force, say hitting or slapping, would help them to remember the lesson so that they would not do the wrong thing again... . But if this [hitting or slapping] is done to an older person, it is different. It is not about 'teaching' him a lesson even if he had done something wrong, say forgot turning off a tap. No matter what, when younger ones hit or slap older persons, it is outrageous and is totally against the natural rule of a family. It is of course elder abuse'. [Grace, 86 years old]*

It is here that the more subtle influence of cultural expectations begins to emerge as an important factor in shaping the perceived nature of abuse. Physical assault against older people was considered elder abuse not simply for the actual assault itself but because it was a manifestation of a lack of respect for the older person and their position as a valued family member. Degrading treatment was universally condemned even if the actual physical assault itself was not severe, as the description below, in which an elderly participant witnessed her

neighbour being shoved by her daughter-in-law with a broom, demonstrates:

*'it was so heart-breaking to see that: I was passing by and saw the daughter-in-law of my friend using a broom to shove my friend, scolding her for being untidy...it is so shameful to be treated like that by her own daughter-in-law. No matter what had happened, she is 89, she does not deserve such a degrading treatment from anyone.'* [Lily, 72 years old]

In situations where physical assault occurred and this was accompanied by what could be perceived of as a disrespectful or humiliating component then abuse was readily identified and the severity was seen as more intense. In other instances, however, the issue was not so clear-cut. Sometimes it depended upon the context of the act itself and, as noted above, the intent that the participant ascribed to it. This was the case in the vignette scenario in which the son, a taxi driver, was repeatedly woken at night by his father's coughing and shook him several times to make him stop:

*'This is a tough call, you know. He [the son] needs to work in the morning and he needs to get some sleep. If he just shakes the father to stop him cough and both could then get some sleep, then no trouble, and no fuss should be made out of it...'* [Olivia, 65 years old, witnessed abuse]

Clearly whilst in many cases physical acts, including slapping, hitting, punching, shoving and pushing, were seen as abusive the severity was compounded when such acts could be perceived as also being overtly disrespectful to the older person's place in the family. Interestingly those participants who had not themselves been subject to abuse were much more likely to see even a single act as being abusive whereas those who had been abused, or had witnessed abuse,

were more likely to look for other explanations, such as Olivia above. This is something that will be considered in more detail later. Next, attention is turned to *being neglected/abandoned* as a form of abuse.

### **5.3.3 Being neglected / abandoned**

The second most frequent example of elder abuse cited by the older participants was that of being neglected or abandoned, especially when older people had difficulties in meeting their daily needs and they were not supported by family members. Such needs might include attention to personal care but could also be expanded to include areas such as medical care and attention. One of the participants drew on his own experiences to illustrate his point:

*'...well, it [elder abuse] means family member neglect to care for their older family members. For instance, when I was very sick and had a fever, my children did not care, they did not take me to the doctor's even though I was unable to make it there myself. The clinic was on the second floor with no lift, it was difficult for me to climb up all the stairs. And there were times when I was unable to take care of some of the basic stuff I used to manage when I was a bit younger; I wish they could give me some help. After all, I was there to raise them up when they were little kids, you know.'* [Danny, aged 80, abused by daughter-in-law]

In this example, the participant clearly suggests that his children had a responsibility to provide support for him, just as he had done for them when they were younger. From this and other examples, it became apparent that to many older participants, elder abuse was essentially an intergenerational issue. They believed that younger family members had a duty to pay close attention to



the needs of older family members and ‘*expected*’ them to take care of them when such needs emerged. The role that such ‘*expectations*’ played in perceptions of abuse will be explored in more detail shortly.

Acts of neglect could be obvious and overt as the quote below clearly shows:

*‘... it is about neglecting an older person’s basic needs, providing them with no food, giving them no bed to sleep on, and leaving them no money to live on’. [Pam, 78 years old, abused by son and husband]*

But perceived neglect could also be far more subtle and involved acts of omission, as well as acts of commission, which could be seen as equally, or more, abusive:

*‘...my neighbour is about 92 years old, she can no longer trim her own toe nails because she cannot see well. They get very long and keep growing and curling. Yet no one in the family seems to care. And don’t forget, they all live in the same household [so that they should have known about this]. To me, that is elder abuse, they don’t care what she needs, they don’t see, and they don’t ask.’ [Wendy aged 74, a witness of elder abuse]*

However, as suggested earlier, the issue of intent also appeared important here, and the same act could be viewed by some participants as being a clear example of abuse, whereas others had a differing interpretation. The vignette described here provides a good example of this. It involves ‘*a father, 70+, has been getting forgetful recently. To avoid causing a fire at home, his daughter locks him out of the apartment and lets him wander around in the nearby park or shopping mall during the day hours. She then brings him home after she finishes work in*

*the evening.'*

Data on the responses to this scenario indicate that for some older participants this was an obvious case of abuse, as the man's basic needs were being neglected:

*'...this is crazy. [In the outdoor environment] it can get cold or too hot or it may rain, etc. Being so old and having no place to settle in for the entire day time- this has to be one of the worst scenarios I could ever imagine happening to any older person.'* [Verna, aged 76]

There were however, other participants who took the daughter's situation into account. They contended that as long as her father had enough money to support himself throughout the day, then this was not so clearly abusive behaviour:

*'She needs to do something to prevent him from hurting himself if left alone at home...if he stays in the mall, he can use his pocket money to buy lunch. The daughter needs to make sure that he's got the money though.'* [Nelson, aged 80]

The question of 'neglect' was not confined to material needs alone but also extended to depriving an older person of regular contact with his/her family, even if this was by remote means. One of the participants used her own example of her daughter living in Canada to explain this:

*'...I know she may need to work very hard and long hours there... she has 3 kids to raise...but at least she could have called me once a year to see if I am still alive...?'* [Pam, 78 years old, abused by son and husband]

Once again, the intergenerational dimensions of abuse seem to be at play here, and the deep psychological hurt caused by being neglected, or even abandoned, by children, was raised on a number of occasions:

*'One of my three sons lives nearby with his family... but even so, they seldom contact me at all. Even when they eat out to celebrate big festivals, they would not invite me... I am very disappointed... it hurts [pointing to the heart] very much. It seems that we are strangers. We have no contacts, no communications, and no nothing. It is very cold of them to treat me like that, you know.'* [Bonnie, aged 65, bullied by neighbour]

The majority of older people in the study still held on to traditional beliefs and expectations about filial piety and for them the hurt caused by feeling neglected or abandoned by their family was all the more severe. Indeed the perception of feeling excluded from family life, as opposed to being deliberately neglected, was seen as one of the most subtle but hurtful forms of psychological abuse. It is to this area that attention is now turned.

#### **5.3.4 Psychological abuse**

##### ***Being excluded from family life and love***

As they age, most Chinese older people prefer to stay in their own homes and to have family around them. Indeed, feeling a valued part of the 'family' is central to older Chinese peoples' sense of self and of purpose. For the older participants in the study feeling excluded from everyday family life was a form of betrayal and a subtle but very hurtful form of abuse that was expressed forcefully by many:

*'... They (family) simply ignored me. That evening, the entire family were sharing bean curd desert among themselves, no one even bothered to ask if I wanted some. We're all in the living room. I was there with them... They didn't give me any at all. It was as if I did not exist there or was invisible to them. But I was sitting in the living room, just under their nose...' [Wendy, aged 74]*

In traditional Chinese culture, there has always been a perceived order or hierarchy within a family, even if this is often quite subtle. Under customary practices, older family members enjoy a higher 'rank' in a family, and it is a status that should increase with age. However, it became apparent during data collection and analysis that as many of the older people aged and became more dependent on their adult children, especially financially, they felt that they started to lose their status in the family, and believed that they could not 'voice' their feelings:

*'...you know; we are too old to be financially independent. We have to rely on our children for our daily living. Under that situation, how can we voice out our inner feelings of discontent ... having no status, we simply have no say in the family. That's it.' [Bill, aged 76, abused by daughter-in-law]*

Older participants felt that a perceived loss of status and being seen as 'valueless' in a family was a presage to their being excluded from family life. Roles that were traditionally accorded older members, such as grand parenting, were now often given to others, many not even family members:

*'In the old days, even when we were very poor, we always stuck together as a family and we stood up strong against hardships ... But nowadays, older people are no longer*

*seen as useful anymore. My children would rather have domestic helpers to raise their kids – my grandchildren. I am left out from their care. Previously older family members were seen as being of great value to a family. They helped with raising up grandchildren at home. They contributed to the family daily living and they were part of the family. But that has changed. It is no longer the case in reality now. Older people were treated as a treasure to a family before, but now we are only valueless hay / straws (以前是寶, 現在是草).’ [Sue, aged 71, abused by husband]*

Not being accorded a role in bringing up grandchildren was seen as a particularly invidious and hurtful form of ‘abuse’, and was often raised by participants:

*‘...my friend is accused by her own son for being unhygienic and therefore, he stops her from seeing the grandson..., I think that is more than just elder abuse. She is torn apart from inside: being denied family love. When you grow old, that is all that matters to older persons – family. You know older people are very fond of seeing and spending time with their grandchildren. Forbidding them seeing their own grandchildren is a cruel treatment, a punishment even.’ [Nancy 90 years old]*

This perception of being excluded from, and losing influence in, the family was echoed by other participants and as the exchange below illustrates this form of abuse was often subtle but nevertheless deeply hurtful:

*‘...since the very first day when he (his son) got married, his wife has never ever greeted me, not even for once. On my birthday last year, I know she knew it was my birthday, but she said nothing (happy birthday) to me at all. And*

*during Chinese Lunar New Year, it is a custom to greet you by saying 'Kung Hey Fat Choy' you know, but again, she would never greet me... We live in the same household, but even when we run into each other in the corridor at home, she would just drop her head and walk away...unbelievable! She shows no respect to older person at all.'* [Danny, 80 years old, abused by daughter- in-law]

Interviewer: "How is lack of respect related to elder abuse?"

*'Elder abuse is about hurting older people...hitting an older person is of course one type of elder abuse...but ignoring and disrespecting older persons can actually hurt even deeper inside. It might be subtle but it is very hurtful. And it lasts inside for a very, very long time, making the older person live in suffering, it must be abuse.'* [Danny, 80 years old, abused by daughter-in-law]

As with a number of previous examples, the intergenerational nature of many instances of abuse is again all too clear here, with daughters-in-law often playing a central, if subtle, role, for example by excluding the older person at family meal times:

*'...how could that ever happened? This is outrageous, I tell you: the nasty daughter-in-law makes my friend, who is already 86-year-old, eat and finish dinner by herself early every evening so that they can reset the table and for the rest of the family to have dinner together without this old woman. It seems she is just extra to the family'.* [Olivia, aged 65, witnessed abuse]

It is worth noting at this point that the emphasis on the daughter-in-law as being the main perpetrator of abuse may in part be an artefact of the sample in the study, as explored below.

According to the official statistics in Hong Kong (Social Welfare Department Hong Kong 2015), among the 569 reported cases of elder abuse in 2014, abusers were mainly: spouse (56.8%); son (10.5%); domestic helper (9.7%); with abuse by the daughter-in-law being the lowest percentage (3.2%). This may of course be as a result of the way in which abuse is categorised in this system, with the subtle forms of abuse described by participants not being included. Nevertheless, the relative absence of daughters-in-law is striking considering that more than 90% of the older participants in this study thought that daughters-in-law were likely to be the main abuser, with other people rarely figuring, as illustrated below:

*'Of course it must be the daughters-in-law. Mostly they [abusers] are daughters-in-law ... because they despise older parents-in-law for blocking their way, or taking up the valuable space in the small flat... and despise the older parents for their poverty...this is happening in my neighbour's household. Whenever the older woman's son is away to work during the day, the daughter-in-law would lock the mother-in-law out...that is surely elder abuse.'*  
[Sue, aged 71, abused by husband]

Sue's image of a 'bad daughter-in-law' was not hers alone, Ulla and others shared a similar view, as demonstrated below:

*'I think and have heard that most of the abusers in abusive cases involve daughters-in-law... more than 99% ... sons and daughters are less likely to abuse their own parents. Daughters-in-law are different, they do not share same level of love and respect for the older members in the family.'* [Ulla aged 79, abused by her daughter-in-law]

It may be that my participants were drawing on their own experiences and extrapolating these to the population more widely but it is worth noting that from the older participants' perspectives, a spouse was not generally considered as a potential abuser and it seemed that they may have applied differing criteria to spousal relationships. For example in a modified scenario where an elderly spouse awakens his frail wife to cook for him at 2am in the morning participants looked for factors that might '*explain*' this as something other than abuse:

*'... This is different. Maybe the husband cannot cook it for himself and needs her help. If so, there is no abuse. Anyhow, when it is between husband and wife, then it is not elder abuse because both are old.'* [Cindy, aged 81, had witnessed elder abuse]

The original scenario had involved a son rather than a husband and here participants often viewed it as a form of abuse. As the last sentence above indicates one notable message to emerge from the data was the finding that older participants seemed to think that one older person was unlikely to abuse another older person. Therefore, to the participants, elder abuse was mainly an intergenerational issue, with younger family members usually ill-treating older persons. The considerable emphasis placed on daughters-in-law may also be due to the fact that it is easier for an older person to blame an '*outsider*' to the family than it is to accept that their own son/daughter is abusing them. The role that '*expectations*' and '*explanations*' played in shaping perceptions of elder abuse will be considered shortly.

The failure of a son to intervene when a daughter-in-law was perceived to be abusive added a further layer of hurt as illustrated below. '*Killing with words*' – was a term that one older participant used to describe how deeply hurtful it



felt when she was in conflict with her daughter-in-law but got no support from her son. At one point she felt *so* worthless as to contemplate suicide:

*'...I think psychological abuse is the worst among all types [of elder abuse] as it is long lasting and hurts older persons deep inside. I almost wanted to kill myself one time because my daughter-in-law argued with me ... not only that, but she also threw all my clothes and other personal belongings out of the household and wanted to expel me from the flat after a verbal fight... The daughter-in-law attacked me verbally: 'get lost you old woman, what a waste of rice (to keep you alive), why everyone dies but not you' ... but sadly, my son was unable to do anything about it.'* [Ulla, aged 79, abused by her daughter-in-law]

A number of the participants saw the loss of an older person's place in the family as being one indication of wider societal changes in which the status of older people more generally was being eroded. As evidence of this, they cited government policies with regard to pensions and income for older people that they felt further served to undermine their status in the family, as described below:

*'...you know many of us don't have any pension or savings when we retire. For us, retirement is unemployment. We are down to a burden to our family upon retirement. Government's subsidy for the aged is pitiful and disgraceful. Worse, even, they demand a formal declaration (衰仔紙) from my son stating that he will no longer support me in any ways, or else I won't be able to get the subsidy... I don't understand why they are doing this. It is so disgraceful and abusive!'* [Hilda, aged 81]

The above quote suggests another way in which older peoples' status was being

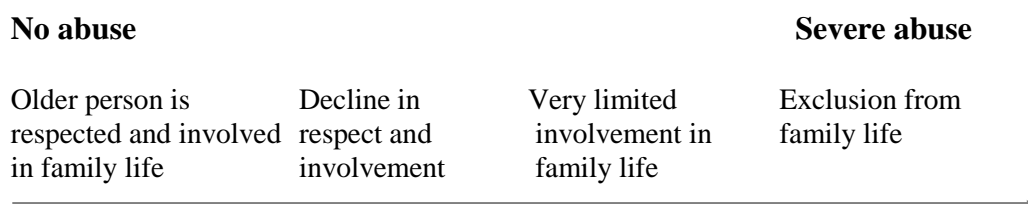
eroded and this related to their ability to make decisions about their own futures. This was seen as another manifestation of the *'disrespect'* that seemed to lie at the heart of most forms of psychological abuse.

As suggested above the notion of being excluded from family life in various ways surfaced at a number of levels and can be seen as a manifestation of the lack of respect now shown to older people. This can be conceived of as existing along a continuum with respect being slowly eroded to the point where there is none left. For many participants this position was seen as the most hurtful but subtle form of abuse that they could experience and was related closely to beliefs about filial piety and the position/status of older members within the family. This will be explored in greater detail shortly. This slow erosion of the place of the older person was often seen to happen over time and marked a deterioration of family relationships that could be a precursor to abuse occurring.

*'(Over time) There would slowly be less love, less trust, less respect, and more quarrels as the family relationship wears down. If the situation continues, the family ties will become very shaky, and older people's needs may not be taken care of. That may lead to elder abuse...'* [Ida, 68 years old]

The notion of slow erosion of respect toward older family members is captured in the figure below.

**Figure 5.1 Erosion of respect and involvement related to perceptions of elder abuse**



Having considered quite subtle forms of so-called ‘psychological’ abuse, attention is now turned the seemingly more overt act of financial abuse.

### **5.3.5 The financial abuse of older persons**

Among the various manifestations of abuse reported to the Hong Kong elder abuse registry – the ‘*Central Information System on Elder abuse cases*’ established in March 2004 – financial abuse increased from 11.9% in 2013 to 16% in 2014. Such cases often involved adult children who deceived their illiterate older parent into selling their apartments by persuading them to sign documents under false pretences. Many of the participants were aware of such cases and saw it as an obvious example of abuse:

*‘If they [children] need it (my money / property) they can have it, because they will be my inheritors anyway, and I won’t be able to take any of my money to my coffin in any case. But they have to ask me first honestly, it would have been abuse of my property if they don’t’. [Ulla, aged 79, abused by her daughter-in-law]*

But judgements about whether an act could be considered as financial abuse were not always black and white. This was demonstrated in the responses to the scenario in which a son refused to send his 88-year-old mother to a nursing home for care following a stroke as recommended by her medical team. The main reason for the son’s refusal was so that he could keep his mother at home and thereby obtain the full Comprehensive Social Security Assistance from the government. The scenario provoked an array of responses, with some seeking to ‘*explain*’ the son’s behaviour and being reluctant to see it as abuse:

*‘[I]t is difficult to say...but at least he let her stay at home. So even if he does not know how to take good care of her,*

*he might be wrong... but he is not so bad. I think it cannot be seen as elder abuse.’ [Jane, 68 years old, abused by son and daughter-in-law]*

*‘[T]his son is too selfish and ... greedy. He gets the money at the expense of his mother’s wellbeing...this is a bad son... but is this elder abuse? I don’t know, maybe not as bad as that yet ....’ [Elsa, 73 years old]*

To others however it was a clear example of elder abuse:

*‘... I think there is clear element of elder abuse. You see, his older mother needs the proper care in a nursing home. That may include proper food and feeding, special arrangement for bath, etc. the son should know that he cannot provide all these basic proper care to his mother, and yet still insists to keep her at home, that is abuse to me ...’ [Ulla, aged 79, abused by daughter-in-law]*

Once more, the diversity of opinions amongst participants is evident. However, an area where there was little comment was on the issue of the sexual abuse of older people.

### **5.3.6 The ‘silent’ issue of sexual abuse**

One of the vignette scenarios used in the interviews had an element of potential sexual abuse built in. I would deliberately hold this example back until later in the encounter to see if any older participants might initiate discussion on this topic spontaneously, but none of them did. I subsequently introduced the vignette in which a divorced ex-husband attempted to have sex with his 67-year-old ex-wife ‘Ah Mui’ who did not consent to it. However, both male and female participants seemed reluctant to discuss this and, even upon direct questioning,

were not clear that this was a form of elder abuse, as the following responses to the question ‘*Do you consider that this is a case of elder abuse?*’ show:

A male participant remarked:

*‘[that] I don’t know... due to his age (old), how could it be elder abuse? You know, men’s mind of this stage may be different from that of women... women of that age may not have such desire. In this case, Mui could just walk away if she does not want it....’ [Bill, 76-year-old]*

A female participant also avoided terming the scenario as sexual abuse:

*‘Um... it depends... Ah Mui consents to it, then it is okay, it should be fine. If not, that is not acceptable... it is hard to say. Maybe it is due to his guilt feeling, that he abandoned her before and that he wishes to come back and make up for her... but still, it needs Ah Mui’s consent.’ [Wendy, 74 years old]*

Here, as in a number of cases, participants seemed to be looking for ‘*explanations*’ that might justify this behaviour, or at least provide a sufficient rationale for them to ‘*excuse*’ it. This further reinforces the complex array of factors that influenced participants’ judgements about what constituted elder abuse. Analysis suggested that a number of processes seemed to be at play here and I have termed these ‘*evaluating*’, ‘*explaining/excusing*’ and ‘*enduring*’. The relationships between these factors are now explored in further detail.

## **5.4 Older participants’ responses to elder abuse**

### **5.4.1 The role of ‘*evaluating*’ in understanding elder abuse**

The complex nature of how the participants viewed elder abuse is now quite clear and it is apparent that the same act might be seen as abusive or not by

differing individuals dependent in large part upon '*evaluations*' about the intent behind the act and how it accorded with what people saw a '*reasonable*' behaviour in a given context. It became apparent that participants had certain '*expectations*' about behaviours towards frail older people and that they '*evaluated*' an act in the light of these expectations.

The dominant underpinning value this group used in judging whether an act was abusive or not, rested on their strong expectation that younger people should uphold traditional filial obligations by paying due respect to, and taking care of, their elderly parents if required. Paying elders due respect was central to these expectations. Chinese traditional culture has been heavily influenced by Confucian values, which place considerable emphasis on maintaining family relationships, and such beliefs have essentially shaped older Chinese peoples' perceptions of many social issues, including, this study would suggest, elder abuse. As data analysis revealed, older participants '*evaluated*' whether a certain act or behaviour was seen as abusive or not usually by drawing on their long-held and deeply instilled beliefs about how they '*expected*' younger family members to behave. This may in part help to explain why acts of abuse were primarily seen to be intergenerational.

Central to these '*expectations*' were notions of filial piety. Filial piety demands that parents should take good care of their children when they are young, and the same '*expectation*' applies to children if their parents need support in older age. Moreover, as we have seen, such beliefs do not relate only to physical care but also require that children show their older parents due '*respect*'. The ideal of '*interdependence*' between generations has existed for thousands of years in

Chinese culture, and a failure to live up to such '*expectations*' seems to lie at the heart of the most subtle and hurtful forms of abuse. The less that adult children or younger family members fulfilled their '*expected duty*' the more likely were older participants to perceive it a form of elder abuse, especially when they believed that the older person was not being accorded the '*respect*' that they deserved.

However, other than in the case of overt physical abuse, judgements were not straightforward and participants often employed the processes of '*explaining and excusing*' and/or '*enduring*' before they '*exposed*' the abuse to others. The former involved participants in looking for a legitimate reason or rationale for a given behaviour, and if one could be found then an attribution of abuse was unlikely as the act could be '*excused*'. The latter process of '*enduring*' involved participants '*putting up*' with a potentially abusive act rather than '*exposing*' it and seeking help. As will be seen such a decision again often turned on their desire to honour traditional Chinese values, such as maintaining family harmony. The process of '*explaining/excusing*' will be explored first.

#### **5.4.2 The role of '*explaining and excusing*' in understanding elder abuse**

As noted above the process of '*explaining*' was one that involved participants in seeking a legitimate reason or rationale for a behaviour that might otherwise be seen as abusive. If a legitimate '*explanation*' could be found then the act could be '*excused*'. '*Explaining*' might take a number of forms. At its most basic level an act could be '*explained and excused*' if it was seen as a '*one off*' event or could be viewed as an atypical response to a stressful situation:

*'Hitting older person is no doubt elder abuse.... but it could*

*be out of a gush of anger that suddenly gets out of control. It would be over soon, and it could be understandable... but if this happens again, and again ...I would need to call the police.’ [Danny, aged 80, abused by daughter-in-law]*

Participants also sought to ‘explain’ and ‘excuse’ a behaviour by seeing it in the context of the very busy and stressful lives that younger family members now lived, and the fact that they had responsibilities of their own to meet. Consequently the idea that ‘*younger people now needed to work long hours*’ was frequently cited by older participants in ‘*explaining*’ why they thought younger family members were not taking care of them as they ‘*expected*’.

*‘You got to be realistic. They have their own life and they all need to work hard. They have their own family to take care of, too.... So when I get sick, I often go and seek medical care by myself... it would be good if they could come along with me attending medical follow-ups. But they are busy all the time.’ [Cindy, 81]*

Similar responses arose in a number of interviews. For example, a 79-year-old participant who had numerous chronic illnesses including diabetes, arthritis, visual impairment and cardiac problems had never been accompanied by either of her two sons for any medical check-up. She was tearful during the interview when recalling the various challenges she had to face and was deeply unhappy about the lack of family support she received. However, she ‘*explained*’ this to herself as the reality of their ‘*busy work life*’:

*‘... My family [younger] members were very busy with work. Oh, my sons were not home when I do all these (medical appointments). They needed to work...’ [Ulla, 79, abused by daughter-in-law]*



Others looked for potential ‘*explanations*’ that cast the older person as being at least partially responsible for their children’s’ behaviour. For example, many participants noted the lack of filial piety and respect in the behaviour of many children, but some argued that this might have been due to poor parenting and the fact that such values were not instilled in the children as they were growing up, as the quote below shows:

*‘True, the traditional culture of filial piety is good in nurturing younger generation to respect and take care of older parents. But not everyone grows up in such a good ‘soil’ or background these days... some parents may fail to nurture or train their children properly [the filial way],... and without prompt reminders from parents, bad patterns can become bad habits and eventually bad things, such as elder abuse may occur. Parents are simply too busy nowadays. If parents fail to teach or guide children on the right track, it is possible that the children will not treat older parents well. That is why I am saying some abused parents should take the responsibility for occurrence of elder abuse. They might have failed in their own role...’ [Olivia, 65 years old, witnessed elder abuse]*

Others saw the ‘*difficult*’ behaviours of some older people themselves, combined with their failure to recognise the compromises needed by all parties when living in close proximity with their extended family, as being potential ‘*explanations*’ for elder abuse, again providing an ‘*excuse*’ for the wider family:

*‘To my understanding, elder abuse occurs when an older person fails to pay respect to others... you know, as people grow old, then can be quite demanding and showing no respect to others. That can be very repulsive indeed.’ [Bill,*

*76 years old, abused by daughter-in-law]*

*'Some older persons can be quite, hmm... how should I put it, nagging, yapping all day long... this could set off arguments and once that starts, it can end up quite ugly and eat out the family relationship. Also, living in such a small flat together, we need to be more accommodative, to ventilate our feelings as much as we can.'* [Frank, aged 90]

The twin challenges of living in close proximity with a multigenerational family and the perceived erosion of traditional Chinese values are succinctly captured in the quote that follows:

*'The small flat we lived in had only one toilet. I remember there was one time, when one of my grandchildren was in the bathroom for more than half an hour – reading his comic book there. I am old, I have trouble controlling my bladder, you know, I humbly asked him to hurry up; he replied half-heartedly but did not move... I ... [shaky voice] ended up wet myself right there. I did not blame my grandson; he was too young to understand. However, I do blame it on my daughter-in-law. As a mother, she should have done a better job in teaching her son. But she didn't. That's her fault.'* [Ulla, 79, abused by daughter-in-law]

Some of the participants were however conscious that the older person's behaviour might act as a trigger for abuse and so sought to modify it accordingly:

*'The most important thing for us, older persons, is to be understanding and considerate. Never tell other people what to do based on own values, don't be judgmental. It can really be irritating... and we should be smarter –and not intrude in others' business. Just mind our own business.'* [Danny, 80, abused by daughter-in-law]

Others, who were aware of such potential ‘trigger’ behaviours chose either to remove themselves from the situation or not respond to provocation, as follows:

*‘I’d go out for a walk when that [abuse] happens. To stay out until he settles down and then I’d then return home at night after he has fallen asleep. I have get used to his bad temper, I know when to stay away from him, the key is to avoid the most ferocious moment... that is how I used to do when he yelled at me...I just put up with it [Pam, 78, abused by son and husband]*

The responses above are examples of how some older participants chose to put up with, or ‘endure’ elder abuse and this is considered further below. Prior to that however, attention in turned briefly to attempts to cast elder abuse into a far wider social context.

As noted earlier some participants sought to blame government policies for the decrease in filial piety and this rationale was also used to explain the increase in elder abuse, thereby removing much of the responsibility from the family, as Lily explains below:

*‘The issue is complex. However, I think the government is somehow responsible for the occurrence of elder abuse. You see, older people worked very hard for their whole life and contributed to the society when they were young. But the government does not seem to care enough for them when they age and need to assistance. Many are left without a pension and they have used up their saving to bring up their children. The small amount of so-call Old Age Allowance from the government is so shameful, it is far from meeting elder’s basic financial needs. Putting older people under such a miserable circumstance can also be considered as elder abuse.’ [Lily, aged 72]*

Whilst, as indicated above, a number of potentially abusive acts could be 'explained' and 'excused' others could not. However, this did not mean that the older participants would automatically 'expose' the abuse and seek help. Many, as outlined above, stated that they would rather 'endure' the abuse and simply put up with it. This might be for a number of reasons, as explored below.

#### 5.4.3 'Enduring' elder abuse

The question as to why some older participants chose to 'endure' elder abuse is, like the phenomenon itself, complex. For some the decision to 'endure' the abuse was seen as preferable to the alternative, that of leaving the family home and living on their own:

*'...Despite all these things– that she has been treated badly by her daughter-in-law, she remains to live there with them, unhappily, but still with the family. I think she fears the feeling of being alone.'* [Rita, aged 82]

*'... [By putting up with abuse] at least I can still stay here at my home with my family... I don't want to be alone.'* [Pam abused by son and husband, aged 78]

In other cases, however more subtle considerations came into play. These, as with the notion of filial piety, were underpinned by the desire to adhere to traditional Chinese values. In this case however it was usually about 'maintaining family harmony' or not wishing to 'lose face' in front of the local and wider community.

In face of abusive situations some older people stated that they would prefer to put up with ('endure') it in order to try and maintain family harmony for as long

as possible. This desire is underpinned by the old Chinese expectation: [家和萬事興 (Jiā hé wànshì xīng)] which means *if the family lives in harmony, all affairs will prosper*.

The influence of this adage was apparent in the way that seven of the older participants, all females, indicated that they would put up with abusive behaviour in order to preserve family harmony, some specifically using the term ‘*endure*’. Many highlighted the potential benefits of ‘*enduring*’ the situation:

*‘I think I would try my best to endure it... my husband used to be short tempered too. The anger might last for a few days and that will be fine then. Husband and wife need to endure and accommodate each other in order to maintain the relationship. If you do not put it up, the heat will flare and the relationship will turn sour and eventually rotten. Endurance is important in a family.’ [Rita, aged 82, possibly abused by niece]*

It seemed that Rita was not alone in prioritizing family harmony above other issues:

*‘I think maintaining family harmony is the first and most important thing to do (when facing potentially abusive situations). Good family relationship can ease off the pain from many unavoidable disputes or tension within a family. When a family is working together, things would not get too ugly... also, older people should learn to be smart – knowing when to remain quiet...staying optimistic, you know.’ [Ida, aged 68]*

Whilst the desire to maintain harmony within the family was a powerful reason for some older participants ‘*enduring*’ abuse, others were fearful that if they ‘*exposed*’ it to the authorities that they would either ‘*lose face*’ in front of their

neighbours or that the abuser (towards whom some still felt a degree of affection) would be punished. The two quotes below capture these feelings, and in both instances the motivation to avoid these consequences was sufficient for them to 'endure' their situation. In the first case Sue, 71, explained that her husband used to be a heavy drinker, spending most of their money to alcohol. When he got drunk, he used to be cruel to Sue but she was very reluctant to disclose his abusive behaviours due to potential embarrassment:

*'It is embarrassing for neighbours to know that I have been abused by my husband...and people might look down upon me, you know? Because it is a shame, I'd prefer to keep it to myself...'* [Sue, aged 71, abused by husband]

In the second case, the abused person, according to the participant, did not report the situation as despite its seriousness she did not want the perpetrator, her son, to potentially go to prison:

*'... My friend is 80+ now. She lives with her only son in a small flat. The son is a gambler and a drug addict. He sneaked into her room and stole her money when she was out. When she returned and found it out, she was very angry and wanted to call the police, but she eventually dropped it because she did not want to see the son become a prisoner. She had no choice, he is her only son... and if I were she, I would probably do the same too, you know. But poor thing, all the saving she got has been stolen by her own son. She was so helpless.'* [Teresa, aged 65, had witnessed abuse]

The complex nature of perceived abuse emerged clearly from the data, as did the importance of 'evaluating' behaviours in the light of peoples' 'expectations' (usually based on long held Chinese beliefs) and subsequently often seeking to

either ‘*explain/excuse*’ or ‘*endure*’ them. It is therefore small wonder that many participants would not ‘*expose*’ the abuse and seek help. Even if they did, the first port of call was usually their wider circle of family and friends, referral to the authorities was unusual.

#### **5.4.4 ‘*Exposing*’ abuse to ‘informal’ contacts**

If, and when, participants decided that they should tell others about the abuse they were experiencing and thereby ‘*expose*’ it to a wider audience older participants usually turned, or said that they would do if they were to be abused, to their wider family and/or friends first. This was either to seek advice or, more often, just to have the opportunity to share their concerns with someone else.

Often older people were not sure how to react to their situation or even if it constituted abuse. For example, Sue, despite years of aggression from her alcoholic husband, did not really consider her husband’s behaviour to be elder abuse, blaming it on his short temper, brought on by his drinking. She ‘*endured*’ this for years until no longer able to put up with his attacks she called her brother and sister to ventilate her feelings. However, when they suggested going to the authorities, she was reluctant to take their advice as she recalls below:

*S: ‘... usually I feel so much better after going out for a walk if he (her husband) is mad at me... this time, it was too much for me to bear. So I called my sister and brother. But when they said they would come over to confront him, I stopped them...’*

I: ‘I see, but why?’

*S: ‘... I did not know what to do at that moment... I just wanted to scare him away. My brother and sister knew about his bad temper, so I thought I called them...as long*

*as he calm down, but they don't need to come over.'*

It was clear during the interview that Sue had very little information and understanding about who she could turn to and eventually her niece had to make contact with a nearby elderly care centre and a social worker called to see her. Even then, however, Sue insisted that she had not been abused. Clearly even contact with formal services does not necessarily result in action. Indeed most of the older participants believed that the main source of help and support for abused older participants was from their peers. This did not usually result in any preventative action but was at least seen to provide a source of moral support that might ease the hurt they felt:

*'...several of us, all 70 – 80+ years old have exercise in the morning. We do that for many years, and are good company for each other. And we go Dim Sum together afterwards. We talk about our family, and there, I heard their daughters-in-law have bullied some of them. We then exchange ideas and give suggestions to help each other. For instance, a man... must be 80+; the family treats him as a burden to them. He gets cold face at home and that makes him sad... we try to cheer him up, invite him out for chat and gathering... old people need to take care of each other now. We cannot expect the way seniors were treated in the old days. Things have changed...' [Wendy, 74, abused by spouse]*

Nelson, an 80 year old participant recounted a similar situation and suggested that such gatherings were the main source of information and discussion about elder abuse for many participants:

*'Yes... I have heard about it [elder abuse]. In a Chinese restaurant where I go for dim sum, I heard older people talk*



*about this issue. Some said their children or daughter-in-law were mean to them... they seemed to like to ventilate their feelings. I think it is hard; every family goes through its problems. But it is good that we can at least share and ventilate, better than bury everything inside ...' [Nelson, aged 80]*

When it came to seeking formal help, both male and female participants were reluctant to do so, usually believing that abuse was best seen as a *'family'* matter.

#### **5.4.5 *'Exposing'* abuse to the authorities**

The act of *'exposing'* abuse to the authorities was not, as noted above, the primary response to perceived abuse amongst participants, rather it was often a last resort. Some said that they would only seek professional help in the most *'serious'* of cases but most saw abuse as being mainly something that needed to be addressed within the family itself.

Of the seven male participants, only one of them said that they would *'expose'* abuse seek help from formal services. This was Nelson, an 80-year-old man who had no direct personal experience of abuse. He stated that he would report it, but that to whom would depend on the perceived seriousness of the incident. When I asked him: *"What would you do if you see your neighbour being abused?"* he responded as follows:

*'... well, if it is serious, we have to call the police. They know what to do to help, and they have the authority to intervene. But if it is minor conflicts, perhaps someone can let the social workers know so that help can be provided if necessary.'* [Nelson, aged 80, talking hypothetically]

Others such as Danny, who saw himself as being abused by his daughter-in-law, were quite clear why they did not want professional help. He believed that the issue was a *'family'* one and that professionals would not be able to either understand the situation or do anything about it:

*'Me? I was very unhappy then, but I cannot be bothered by this (...), professional help? Nope, it is family thing; they (the professionals) won't understand... so they won't be able to help...'* [Danny, aged 80, abused by daughter-in-law]

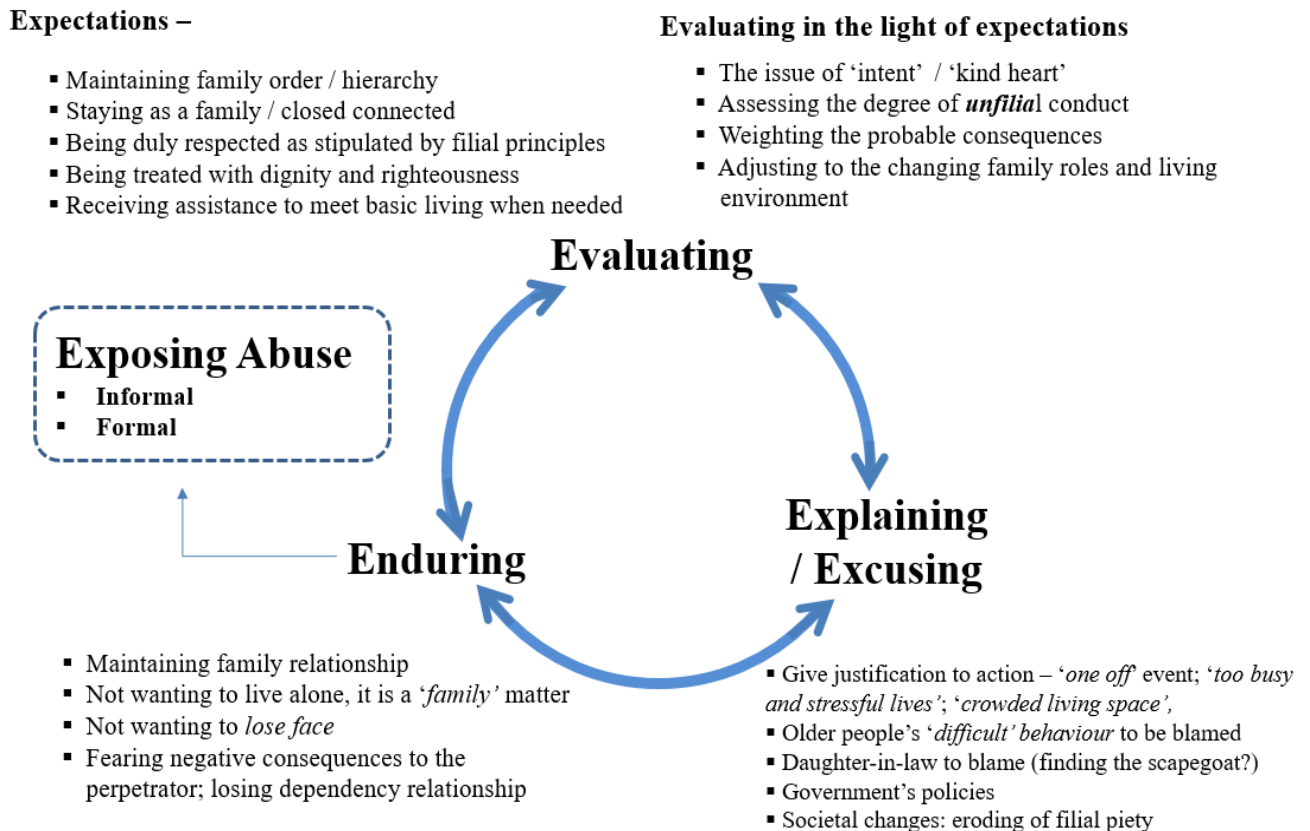
Responses among the female participants were similar, with most of them believing that elder abuse was a family issue and therefore should be dealt with inside the family.

*'Hmmm... if my neighbour older person was abused... I really do not know what I can do to help. I do not mean that I do not want to help, but you know, every family has its own story and situation, and outsiders should not interfere. It is not up to us to help anyway... and if I were she, well. I believe in self-help, that is my motto. No one, but yourself, can help.'* [Olivia, aged 65, witnessed abuse]

The question of whether, and in what circumstances, older people would *'expose'* abuse to those outside the immediate family is a complex one and many would instead prefer to *'endure'* it as described above. The dynamics between potentially *'exposing'* abuse or *'enduring'* it is explored in greater detail when the professional data have been considered and the *'theory'* of elder abuse to emerge from the study is presented. This is considered in the next chapter.

The relationships between the processes of ‘evaluating’, ‘explain/excusing’, ‘enduring’ and ‘exposing’ are summarised in Figure 5.2.

**Figure 5.2 The relationship between the processes of evaluating-explaining- enduring-exposing abuse among older participants**



## 5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has considered the perceptions of the older participants about what constitutes elder abuse and what they would potentially do about it. The phenomenon emerged as a complex one with participants often making subtle ‘evaluations’ about a potentially abusive act in the light of their ‘expectations’ about acceptable behaviour towards older people. Such ‘expectations’ were based mainly on traditional Chinese values, especially those relating to filial piety. However, even if behaviours did not accord with such ‘expectations’ they

were not automatically seen as abusive and participants usually looked to either '*explain/excuse*' an act or to '*endure*' rather than 'expose it'.

Whilst several differing forms of abuse were recognised (Physical, neglect, psychological abuse, financial abuse) sexual abuse did not figure. Moreover, it was the more subtle forms of abuse that were seen to threaten the position of the older person in the family and eroded the respect that older people should be accorded, that were seen as the most hurtful.

It is worthy of note that for the older participants abuse was mainly an intergenerational issue, with daughters-in-law being seen as particularly culpable. The idea that older people could abuse each other was not raised, despite the fact that according to official statistics abuse by spouses is the most prevalent.

Help was rarely sought and if it was then the wider family and friends were the first port of call. Even here, however most participants did not want direct action to be taken but valued being able to '*get things off their chest*'. '*Exposing*' abuse to the authorities was only considered in the most '*serious*' cases, with abuse being seen primarily as a '*family*' issue.

The findings above clearly have several implications for efforts to raise awareness of, and design interventions to address, elder abuse that will be considered in the discussion. In the next chapter, attention is turned to the views of the professionals.

## CHAPTER 6

### FINDINGS FROM THE PROFESSIONAL PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARING THEIR PERSPECTIVES WITH THOSE OF THE OLDER PARTICIPANTS

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#### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the views of the professional participants on elder abuse are presented. The analysis draws on data from both the focus groups and the individual interviews. As described in chapter four, the professional participants were initially selected purposively, followed by snowball and theoretical sampling. Table 6.1 displays a summary of the participants who took part in these activities.

**Table 6.1 Summary of the professional participants taking part in the study**

<b>Means of data collection</b>	<b>Community-based nurses</b>	<b>Community-based social workers</b>
Focus groups	One with 4 persons	one with 5 persons
Individual face-to-face interviews	3	5

This chapter contains three sections. The first presents the demographic characteristics of the professional participants. In the second the perceptions of elder abuse among the professionals will be discussed. Finally, the findings from the older participants and professionals will be compared and contrasted to explore similarities and differences.

A total of eight experienced professionals were interviewed individually comprising three community nurses and five social workers. The focus groups comprised both nurses and social workers based in the community who had experience of working with elder abuse. The chapter begins by considering of

the demographics of these participants.

## 6.2 Characteristics of professional participants

### 6.2.1 Professionals - individual interviews

Eight community based professionals, including three community nurses and five social workers (one of whom was interviewed twice), were interviewed individually during the inquiry process. All of them were purposively selected because they were experienced professionals working with older people living in the community, and were therefore able to provide rich information about the topic under study.

**Table 6.2 Demographics of the professionals interviewed**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>N</b>
Female	6
Male	2
<b>Age</b>	
30-40	2
41-50	4
51-60	2
<b>Professional Background</b>	
Community Nurse	3
Social Worker	5
<b>Years in Gerontological Care Field</b>	
5-10	2
11-20	2
21-40	4
<b>Highest Educational Qualification</b>	
Diploma	1
Bachelor	1
Masters	4
Doctorate	2

All had received formal professional training: one of them had a Diploma in Nursing, one had a bachelor's degree in social work, four had received a master's degree and two were doctoral prepared professionals. The latter represent a fairly elite group of highly experienced and well qualified individuals whose opinions it was thought would be a valuable addition to the study. Their ages ranged from 37 – 54, with a mean age of 44 years; there were two males and six females, all of whom had extensive practical experience of working with community-dwelling older people. The mean number of years working in this particular area was 21, ranging from a minimum of six to a maximum of 36 years.

### **6.2.2 Professionals – focus groups**

In addition to individual interviews, two focus groups were conducted with professional participants in 2012. Participants in the focus groups were different practitioners from those interviewed individually.

One focus group was conducted with four community nurses and the other, with five community-based social workers. In Table 6.3, profiles of those professionals who participated in the focus groups are displayed. The age of those taking part ranged from 30+ to 50+. All were female and worked with older people living in the community, with their relevant work experience ranging from 7 to 36 years. Three of the participants were in management positions, while the others were working on the front line at the time of the focus groups. Each focus group lasted for between 90 – 120 minutes. The findings presented below are based on data from both the interviews and focus groups.

**Table 6.3 Demographics of the professional focus groups participants**

Demographic characteristics		Social worker focus group n=5	Community nurse focus group n=4
Gender		F	F
Number of participants		5	4
Age	30 – 40	1	1
	41 – 50	3	2
	51 – 60	1	1
Community-Geri Experience (years)	5 – 10	1	1
	11 – 15	0	1
	16 – 20	2	0
	21 – 25	1	0
	> 26	1	2
Highest Educational Qualification	Diploma	3	1
	Bachelor’s Degree	1	1
	Master’s Degree	1	2

### 6.3 Professional perceptions of elder abuse

#### 6.3.1 Professionals participants’ definition of elder abuse

Compared with the older people the professionals, at least on the face of it, seemed to have clearer views about what constituted elder abuse. However, as will become apparent, in reality the issue remained difficult to pin down precisely and differences in perception emerged. Most professionals’ working definition of elder abuse related to any behaviour that was deemed to have caused harm to, or compromised the safety of, an older person. Not surprisingly, this working definition was influenced by the ‘official’ definition of elder abuse provided by the Social Welfare Department, which states that: “*Elder abuse refers to the commission or omission of any act that endangers the welfare or safety of an elder.*” (Procedural Guidelines for Handling Elder Abuse Cases 2003, p.15).



For the professionals having an agreed definition of elder abuse was fundamental to recognising and dealing with the issue. However, as a social worker with 25 years of experience pointed out, although everyone notionally worked with the official definition, which was provided in English, the term used to capture elder abuse in Chinese, had a somewhat different connotation:

*'... I think the primary issue is to define what elder abuse truly is first. We do have a set definition used by the Social Welfare Department, but the operational meaning should be applicable to our local context in Hong Kong. I feel the English term is quite different from the Chinese one. The Chinese term of elder abuse [虐老] sounds a lot more serious. It infers that an act must be severe and cause serious injury, especially physically, to the older victims of elder abuse.'* [Tracy, 25 years' experience working with community older people]

As another social worker explained, such differences in emphasis caused potential confusion among those working on the front line and despite repeated meetings to agree a definition consensus proved elusive:

*'... I realised that people have different interpretations of the official definition we are using in Hong Kong. Many of my colleagues used to think there were only a few elder abuse cases in Hong Kong. However, when I shared with them and provided examples of suspected elder abuse cases, they then agreed that many elderly people have experienced similar treatments. Even among our colleagues, we have different perspectives toward elder abuse...for example, should those incidents where a gang of people conned older persons [祈福黨] for money by playing on their traditional superstitions*

*of 'pray for luck and to avoid disasters' be considered as elder abuse? The current definition does not seem to help. In fact, we had several meetings with health professionals and social workers... we are still not definitely clear... [Helen, a social worker, had 10+ years' experience of working with community-dwelling older persons].*

Gordon, another social worker who had been working in a community day centre for older people for more than 21 years, suggested that one needed to be objective when defining the meaning of elder abuse. As the quote below suggests he felt that the views of older people themselves were too subjective:

*'... I think we need to play safe in defining the term elder abuse, as there are guidelines for it. In my opinion, many older people have defined the term quite subjectively. They define it based on their feelings. In their eyes, if a family member does not cook for them or ignores their comments, then it would be regarded as elder abuse because to them, disrespect almost equals to elder abuse. But for us, we need to follow the guideline straight, not according to our feelings, in defining elder abuse.'* [Gordon, had 21 years' experience of working with community-dwelling older persons]

The above quote is important as Gordon seems to recognise how older people themselves see elder abuse, but suggests that their views are perhaps not consistent with the way in which it is officially defined. Consequently he preferred to 'play it safe' and thereby exclude forms of abuse that older people themselves saw as the most hurtful. This suggests potentially important differences between the views of older people and some professionals, an issue that will be explored further later in this chapter. Conversely, the nurse below was far more inclined to align her views with those of the older people:

*'.. (The official) definition of the term elder abuse seems too brief to me. What is elder abuse? I think it is easy to understand: beating, physical harm causing injury to older people is elder abuse. Similarly, intentional neglect of older persons' needs is also elder abuse. Psychologically, intentionally ignoring an older person is also elder abuse.'*  
[Ada, community nurse with 20 years relevant working experience]

Consistent with views of the older people themselves the question of 'intent' seems central here.

As the above quotes illustrate the early data suggested that even among professionals potentially important differences in their views as to what constitutes elder abuse emerged. This is highlighted by Helen below:

*I realize that people have different interpretations of their definition of elder abuse...my colleagues and I often interpret the same case differently. Some say this case has some abusive elements, while others say it is just a care problem...actually, the case could have both elements co-existing, but it can be perceived differently.'* [Helen, social worker with 10+ years' working experience with community-dwelling older people]

To explore this area further, attention is now turned to the professionals' opinions about differing forms of abuse.

### **6.3.2 Professionals' perceptions of different types of elder abuse**

As suggested above most of the professionals taking part in the study believed that they took a more objective view of elder abuse than did older people

themselves. But despite this, differences of opinion existed amongst the professionals and these seemed to be the product of a range of factors including their professional background, current work situation and prior experience. Despite these differences in interpretation there was broad agreement on the most common types of abuse, which were categorised as physical abuse, neglect, abandonment, psychological abuse, financial abuse and sexual abuse.

### **Physical Abuse**

With regards to the more obvious forms of elder abuse, such as physical abuse, the professional participants shared very similar perceptions. As with the data from the older people, physical abuse was the most frequently cited example and if it resulted in moderate to severe injury then professionals would usually report it to the police. Less severe injuries were usually referred to a social worker by any professional who had concerns.

*'The police most likely receive severe physical abuse cases. Less traumatic cases are usually referred to us by some sensitive medical social workers or nurses, when they come across some suspicious bruising or abrasions found on older persons. [Helen, with 10+ years' working experience with community-dwelling older people]*

The data suggested that professionals saw males, usually husbands or adult sons, as the main perpetrators of severe physical abuse, due both to their greater physical strength but also in part owing to the traditional family hierarchy in which men were seen to be in a dominant position. As a result of this, men had a stronger desire to exercise 'control' in the family than did women.

Professionals believed that if men perceived any threat to their position then

they might seek to reassert control using aggression if necessary:

*'... [In many home visits] I have witnessed men who were quite impatient in the face of disputes within a family. They need to be in control, to be the dominant person in the family. So they seem more inclined to use force to get things under their control...' [Betty, had 26 years working experience with community older persons]*

Once again however potentially important differences in perception between professionals and older people emerge here. For the professionals it was spouses and sons who were most likely to inflict physical abuse and yet these groups, especially spouses, were rarely mentioned by older people themselves.

*'I had encountered one case: the couple were both 70 plus then. The wife became disabled after a stroke and the husband, who had never touched any housework in his lifetime, had to take up the role of caregiver and to manage other house business. One time when we visited, we noticed some bruises on her arms. She cried badly when we visited, but she was unwilling to say anything about it and the husband claimed it was due to a fall. But we could tell from the locations of the bruises...that it was not from a fall but possible abuse...' [Betty, a nurse with 26 years' working experience working with older people]*

This case was eventually referred to a social worker to follow up. Using this experience, the nurse participant justified that in determining if a suspected case was abuse, professionals should not merely rely on the involved older persons' perspective because both the victim and the abuser might not tell the whole truth for various reasons.

According to the professionals slapping, hitting, beating and pushing were the

most common types of physical abuse against older persons. Attention is now turned to the second most commonly cited form of abuse, that of neglect.

### **Neglecting / ignoring the basic living needs of older people**

During the interviews and focus groups with the professionals, several categories of what might be termed '*neglect*' emerged. These included providing grossly substandard care or failing to meet the basic needs of elderly persons; placing an older family member in a nursing home and then not visiting them; and ejecting an older person from his or her own home. The paragraphs below will report on the relevant findings in this area.

#### ***Providing grossly sub-standard care or failing to meet basic needs***

This sub-category of neglect was usually based on the beliefs that professionals held about what constituted '*acceptable*' levels of care, as the following case provided by a community nurse demonstrates. She told of an older couple, both in their 80's, where the husband insisted on caring for his wife at home after a stroke. His wife subsequently became doubly incontinent and in addressing this problem her husband used newspapers instead of pads to manage her incontinence. The nurse considered this unacceptable and humiliating for the older woman, but it was deemed to fall just short of actual abuse:

*'This is so unbelievable. The wife had speech difficulty after the stroke, her husband insisted to take care of her at their own home after her discharge from the rehabilitation unit. They were childless and we arranged a community nurse to visit them twice weekly. Soon enough, we found that the husband was taking care of her in a very undesirable way... he used newspaper instead of napkins to handle her double incontinence! This was brought to the*

*team to determine if there was elder abuse. We did not label it as such at that time but we considered it an unacceptable substandard of care that was not that far from abuse really...’ [Ada, a nurse with 20 years’ working experience]*

This case suggests that whilst many professionals *believed* that they had a more objective approach to elder abuse than did older people themselves, they still nevertheless drew on, possibly latent, beliefs and values about what was ‘*acceptable*’ when making decisions about potential abuse. In order to explore this issue further theoretical sampling was used and it emerged that professionals often used a rule of thumb based on ‘*common sense*’ understandings of what a ‘*reasonable*’ person might do when they were making judgements about potential abuse, as Tracy suggests with respect to the case cited above:

*‘Reasonable persons using their common sense would not have used newspapers in such a situation. Also as his wife had been cared in the hospital for a while before discharged home, he should have had learned how to take care of her incontinence at home in a reasonable manner. I think such sub-standard of care can actually be quite humiliating. We might use newspaper in this way when caring for a pet, but certainly not on a person.’ [Tracy, a social worker with 25 years’ working experience with community-dwelling older adults]*

Whilst this notion of applying ‘*common sense*’ was often used by the professionals, a few of the participants questioned whether it was ‘*reasonable*’ to expect older carers to have knowledge of incontinence and its care. Rather the older person may have been drawing on his prior experience. Betty takes

such a stance below and argues that such a possibility should be considered before professionals make judgements about potential abuse:

*'This is difficult, or even a bit unfair, you know. Maybe it was a common practice in his old days to use old newspapers or similar materials to manage such a situation. I think we should consider this before trying to handle it as an elder abuse case at this stage, unless he insists on maintaining this practice despite of our advice. Or, maybe he didn't know where to get those napkins'. [Betty, a community geriatric nurse with 26 years' working experience]*

This suggests that, as with the older people, some professionals tried to 'explain and excuse' behaviours before jumping to the conclusion of elder abuse. However, the idea of applying 'common sense' standards was widely held, as the responses to the scenario in which food was left at a bedside table for an older person with hemiplegia demonstrates. This was widely seen as an example of abuse as it fell 'so below' a 'reasonable' standard of care and flew in the face of 'common sense':

*'It takes only common sense to determine this really makes no sense at all. How could anyone reasonably expect a semi-paralyzed person in a lying position to take the food without risk of choking? What about her continence? She could be lying in the soaking bed or diaper for the entire day? Of course, this sort of home care is unacceptable. It is so below reasonable standard... it is abuse.'* [Ada, with 20 years' working experience with community-dwelling older persons]

The above rationale was widely supported by subsequent professionals interviewed and their voices were clear and strong: providing grossly sub-



standard care to needy older persons and compromising their safety was elder abuse. However, in deciding what might be deemed as ‘*sub-standard*’ it was clear that there was a considerable element of ‘*professional*’ judgement involved about the ‘*potential*’ rather than ‘*actual*’ consequences:

*I can only judge from the conduct and the potential consequences it might have on the older person. I can imagine she could develop other complications such as pressure sore etc. very soon....and yes, I think that is elder abuse.’ [Betty, with 26 years’ working experience with community-dwelling older persons]*

One might think that the issue of what constituted ‘*basic needs*’ would be relatively clear cut, but it was also apparent that this was again a question that involved some form of value judgement. In an attempt to provide a more objective reference point one professional drew on the hierarchy of needs suggested by Maslow and indicated that those needs at the very bottom of the hierarchy, including food, shelter, safety, were essential. But again she assumed that this was a ‘*common*’ understanding:

*‘To answer your question, I think I would ask whether that particular act in question is within common understanding or not. For instance, let us use the Maslow’s hierarchy model to explain. We all need to eat, to drink to breathe... and so on. I guess no one can convince me that it is not elder abuse if he/she fails to provide food, water or such similar basic care to an older person. [Right?] Unlike mental aspects which may have subjective feelings and judgment, it is the physical basic needs we are referring to as basic needs.’ [Betty, with 26 years’ working experience with community-dwelling older persons]*

The quote above suggests that neglecting obvious physical needs was clearly abusive but raises implicit question about ‘*mental*’ aspects of need, which were seen as more ‘*subjective*’. Here more differences between professional groups emerged with nurses being more inclined to focus on physical needs whereas social workers also considered family relationships to be a potential root cause of abuse:

*‘... I see it in the family relationship... when the family’s relation is bad, it is more likely to have abuse... you can expect to see elder abuse more than those in good relationship do. You can almost see the pathway ...’ [Tracy, with 25 years’ experience working with community-dwelling older people]*

Another form of potential neglect was apparent in the scenario in which a daughter locked her father out of their apartment and left him to wander in the shopping mall whilst she was at work. Amongst the older participants, many had sought to ‘*explain and excuse*’ this behaviour and some of the professionals also applied a similar logic:

*‘Before I can judge whether it is an abuse case or not, I think I need to find out what else she has done before locking him out to during the day. Has she exhausted all the community resources in order to provide the basic needs to him? And what is important here is whether she is acting from the perspectives of the older father’s needs. It would be a neglect or inadequate care if she were acting merely for her own sake of convenience. If so, it is more likely a case of elder abuse because she has neglected his needs – rest, to be able to feel safe, etc.’ [Daisy, with 18 years’ experience working with older people]*

To others however this was clearly seen as abuse, especially if the daughter was judged to be placing her own priorities above the safety of her father:

*'I think that is very unreasonable for her to lock her forgetful father out during the day times when she needs to work. The father, despite of his forgetfulness, has his right to stay at home if he wants. The daughter in this case seems to care about the home neatness rather than the real safety of her father. She neglects the potential risk her father may encounter while wandering around outdoors. I consider this as elder abuse, it is unacceptable.'* [Ada, a community nurse with 20 years' experience working with older people]

Once again it emerges that the question of what constitutes '*neglect*' and whether such '*neglect*' can be considered '*abuse*' is underpinned by subtle value judgements that often varied among professionals or were underpinned by '*common sense*' understandings. Consistent with the processes employed by the older participants it seems that in many cases in which elder abuse was not clear cut that professionals engaged in a process of '*evaluating*' an action against a set of often subtle '*expectations*'. As we saw in the previous chapter such expectations amongst older people drew heavily on traditional Chinese values whereas the professionals' expectations arose from a combination of their professional background and personal experience when judging what might be considered as '*common sense*' and '*reasonable*' action.

Another phenomenon perceived by professional participants as a form of elder abuse was when family members were seen to have placed older people in a care home and subsequently ignored them. This was seen as a form of abandonment.

As with neglect the question of what constituted abandonment was not clear cut. In traditional Chinese culture, an older person should be kept within the family and placing them into an institution has long been socially frowned upon. However, the professionals thought this belief needed to be revised and that using a care home was appropriate in some cases, even if this was contrary to the older person's wishes:

*'...I think people need to understand family members' ability and their living environment in taking care of the [needy] older family member before making judgment. If a family has tried their best and yet still unable to manage it, I think sending an older family member to old age home, even without her consent, should not be judged as elder abuse.'* [Betty, had 26 years' experience working with community-dwelling older people]

From the focus group data, both community nurses and social workers echoed the view that simply placing an older person into an institution should not be considered as elder abuse per se. However, failing to support an older person after they had moved into a care home was viewed far more dimly and might be considered as neglect and therefore potential abuse:

*'Older people often get depressed and angry having to move out from their own home and ending up in a nursing home... when that happens family members should visit him/her regularly and frequently. Otherwise, it would mean abandoning the older person, and that to me, would be elder abuse.'* [Wing-sum, with 26 years' experience working with community-dwelling older people]

Having considered the issue of neglect and abandonment attention is now turned to the equally contentious area of psychological abuse.

## **Harming the psychological well-being of older persons**

As was illustrated in the previous chapter for older people psychological abuse was perceived of as the worst type of all. Ulla, a 79 years old participant who had experienced abuse, described psychological abuse as *'invisible, just like a needle hidden in a pile of cotton: you cannot see it, but it hurts the most'*. Such abuse (*'the hidden needle'*) was particularly hurtful if it was seen as a form of disrespect to the older person and/or excluded them from participating in family life. Older people saw daughters-in-law as the primary perpetrators of such abuse. The professional participants in the study also recognised psychological abuse and saw it as comprising three primary types: affronts to the older person's dignity; disregarding an older person's rights; and isolating them from their normal social contacts. These are explored in greater detail below.

### ***Affronts to the older persons' dignity***

Unlike the older participants who drew heavily on ideas of filial piety when considering issues relating to dignity, professionals framed dignity in terms of how family members delivered care to the older person. Ada drew on the example previously cited of the husband who used newspapers to deal with this wife's incontinence. This was seen both as a form of neglect but also, because it was seen to reduce his wife's dignity, as a form of psychological abuse. Again the idea of *'reasonable'* behaviour is drawn upon:

*'...merely because things are not done according to older people's expectation, cannot be said as abusive... but if one who fails to use reasonable sense to provide reasonable care to an older family member in need, then, it can be neglect as well as psychological abuse. Take the case of a husband who used newspapers to handle his*

*wife's double incontinence as an example. It is humiliating and I think that certainly wound her dignity. It is psychological abuse to her.' [Ada, a community nurse, had 20 years' experience working with community-dwelling older people]*

For Daisy, a registered nurse who had worked with older people for more than 10 years, such psychological abuse, whilst on the increase, was not widely recognised as abuse when compared with more overt instances such a physical abuse. Again she frames the issue of dignity in the context of care delivery:

*'Hmm...from my observations, I find that physical abuse is not so common. In contrast, psychological abuse, such as giving no weight to older persons' dignity during care, seems to be more serious and common in the community as well as in nursing homes...sadly, this sort of abuse is largely overlooked. Many still consider only deliberately beating/physical assault can be classified as abuse.'*  
*[Daisy, a nurse, had 18 years' working experience with older people]*

The data therefore indicated that whilst professionals saw affronts to an older person's dignity as a form of psychological abuse the way that they viewed it differed from the older people. For the professionals dignity was viewed in the context of care delivery and they did not see issues of filial piety as being involved. The second form of psychological abuse identified related to disregarding the older person's rights.

### ***Disregarding the older person's rights***

Not allowing an older person to make choices or to exercise their free will, was seen as a form of abuse by some of the professional participants. This emerged when considering the vignette in which a daughter took away her diabetic

mother's pocket money in order to prevent her from drinking sweet milk tea when out. Whilst this was seen by some as *'reasonable'* behaviour as it was motivated by a desire to prevent diabetic complications, others saw it in a differing light and judged that the removal of the mother's free will outweighed any benefits that might arise from not drinking something detrimental to her diabetes:

*'...it seems to me an elder abuse case: the daughter abuses her mother's rights – she should have the right to make a choice – to have a cup of milk tea at the café for instance. It may be something which is important to her, despite her medical conditions. Health is about a person's own choice. Her rights to make choices should not be violated even though she may be slightly forgetful sometimes. By taking away her pocket money, the daughter is taking away her right to make choices as well.'* [Ada, a nurse, had 20 years' experience working with community-dwelling older people]

Using a similar logic, preventing older parents from going out for their morning exercise was considered by some professionals as violating older persons' rights and therefore was abusive, even if the children may potentially have been acting to reduce risk to their parents:

*'They (adult children) may well have their reasons, such as safety concern etc. But it doesn't matter. It is older parents' individual right to go (outdoors) as long as they are mentally competent.'* [Ada, a nurse, had 20 years' experience working with community-dwelling older people]

Such data highlight interesting differences in interpretation about what might be seen as *'reasonable'* and draws attention once again to the subjective nature of

what constitutes the more subtle forms of abuse. Reducing an older person's free will was seen as one manifestation of power differences within families, another example of which involved children limiting their parents' usual social contacts.

### ***Limiting an older person's social contacts or activities***

A social worker in one of the focus groups raised this form of potential abuse. She illustrated it by drawing on an example from her own practice. As will be seen below, it is again the daughter-in-law who was seen to be exercising power over the older person and using this to isolate her:

*'A few months ago, an old woman came to the centre where I work. She was in tears claiming that her daughter-in-law was very mean to her – banning her from using the domestic phone, making it very difficult for her to get social contact with her friend. The daughter-in-law was discontent with her impaired hearing and speaking very loud on the phone. The old woman is often intimidated because when the son is out during the day, the household would be taken charge by her daughter-in-law who would not allow her use the domestic phone, and would even tell her callers off by answering, "We don't have such person here" and hanging up abruptly. It is a type of elder abuse, it interferes the old woman's social life and it insults her, harms her psychological wellbeing. No wonder she was in tears when she comes in our centre...' [Wai, a 45 year- old social worker, and had worked with community- dwelling older people for 18 years]*

Similar types of incident were recognised by others, and usually involved relationships between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law. Such 'abuse' was



seldom seen to be perpetrated against older men by their daughters-in-law (although some of the older male participants did describe this). This suggests that there may well be gender as well as inter-generational differences, in how abuse is manifest. This type of 'abuse' was seen to be a product of a power struggle between the two women, exacerbated by the confined and cramped living arrangements common in Hong Kong.

Despite being recognised as a form of abuse many professionals thought that there was little they could do about it, as suggested below. This may in part explain why questions about the place of the older person in the family, which was widely seen as abuse by older people, were not highlighted so frequently by professionals:

*'Unlike physical abuse, cases such as forbidding an older person from making social contacts with her friends are difficult. I would still consider that it constitutes elder abuse. To the older person it is hurtful and depressing. But we may not be able to press any charge here ...' [Betty, a nurse who had 26 years' experience working with older people]*

Compared to psychological abuse, financial abuse appeared to be more overt to professionals and attention is now turned to their perspectives on this.

### **Financial abuse**

Whilst the possibility of financial abuse was raised by the older people, it was seen to be both more common and more diverse amongst the professionals. One of the most frequent forms cited was taking the older person's money without their consent, as Cheung, a social worker from a focus group describes below:

*'...this old woman came to our centre to seek for help and with some investigation we found out that her daughter had been taking all her Old Age Allowances and government subsidies without her permission, to go gambling; leaving this old woman to take care of the 3 grandchildren with merely about £ 78 (HK\$1000) a month for the entire family expenses.'* [Cheung, a social worker with 30 years' working experience in the field]

This was not an isolated case and many of the social workers recounted similar instances. Moreover, whilst in the case described above the older person was aware that her money was being taken and actively sought help, in other instances in which a professional considered that financial abuse was occurring the older person held a different view. In such cases there was nothing that could be done:

*'This old woman declined our help. We knew she had been collecting old carton boxes and old magazines and newspapers in return for petty money. Her son, daughter-in-law and two grandchildren all live in her public estate flat. Nevertheless, they pay her no rent, nor do they give her any financial support for her living. On the contrary, they get her to buy groceries for family use... to us, it is a clear case of financial abuse, but the older woman does not think so. Rather, she claims that her son is having a hard life and earning too little to support the family...'* [Susan, a social worker with 20 years' experience in the field]

It was in relation to living arrangements that some professionals identified a growing form of what they considered financial abuse. This involved what they termed *'the young-wife old-husband phenomenon of financial elder abuse'*.

This was something that, to the best of my knowledge, has not been publically/officially recognised but was witnessed with increasing frequency by a number of professionals. For example, one social worker now considered that abuse of this type was the most frequent on his casebook and in the last two years 60% (12 cases) of the incidences of elder abuse he had dealt with had involved the financial abuse of older men by younger wives who came from mainland China. Such women, in his view, were deliberately marrying older men in order to gain access to property in Hong Kong, a far more desirable area to live than the mainland.

The ruse worked as follows: after having married and had children the woman would conspire to divorce their older husband and gain custody rights of the children. Under the current legislation this also gave the wife rights to the property in which they were living. Ethan described the serious consequences for the older husband as follows, and his frustration at being powerless to do anything is readily apparent:

*'I think the emergence of such type of elder abuse is related to property. One of the current public housing policies is that the applicant needs to be a permanent HK resident for at least 7 years. Moreover, there is always a long queue. Many of the cases from our estate reveal that the young wives apply for Hong Kong residency after getting married to old guys from Hong Kong. Once they come to Hong Kong, they would start to create some arguments and conflicts deliberately in order to get a divorce. With that, they also demand custody of the children. Being mother, they are usually granted the rights. Here comes the tricky part: according to the current housing policy, whoever has the custody right, will take over the flat's household*

*registration. I have seen many cases; young wives took away old husbands' flat just using the same trick. But we have our hands tied. There is not much we can do about it.'* [Ethan, a social worker, had 10 years' experience working with community-dwelling older people]

Ethan believed that such incidences were likely to become a major social issue in the future, unless the current law was changed:

*'In the public estate where I am working we have about 28,000 residents. Among them, 3000 are older people aged 65 and above, and more than 1000 of them live alone. According to the recent official census statistics, among the live-alone older population on this estate, we have more men than women. Under such circumstance, we are facing a major social problem: many of these older males are unable to find their spouse in Hong Kong and many of them then got married to younger women from the mainland. When the young wives came to Hong Kong and obtained the residency, then further trouble follows... We have 'witnessed' numerous of those young wives used tricks to deceive their older husbands' property, their flat – their home. It has happened a lot lately.'* [Ethan, a social worker, had 10 years' experience working with community-dwelling older people]

In addition to this comparatively new form of '*young-wife-old-husband financial elder abuse*', professional participants also pointed out that sometimes other unscrupulous relatives were involved in gaining an older person's property in exchange for providing them with promises of '*care*'. Such arrangements were usually informal and frequently involved childless older people:

*'In the Yuen Long district, many childless older people who are eager to age in their home trade off their own house*

*for relatives' care. It is somewhat like a verbal agreement in that older people sign off their property to the relative who promises to take care of the older person. But some relatives simply run away once they have the transaction done. They decline to keep the promise in return.'* [Ling, a community nurse with 26 years' experience working with older people] Clearly financial abuse is likely to be a growing problem, especially given the demographics of Hong Kong and the changing relationship with mainland China. More attention will be given to this issue in the discussion.

The last form of abuse recognised by the professionals was sexual abuse.

### **Sexual abuse**

In the previous chapter, it was noted that there was silence on the issue of sexual abuse among the older participants, who were reluctant to recognise it, especially if it was seen to potentially occur in the context of a spousal relationship. Professionals were much more aware of incidents of sexual abuse but rarely had direct personal experience of it as such cases were usually referred directly to the police, especially if a serious assault occurred:

*'...as far as the community is concerned, we don't have any reports of sexual abuse involving older persons as victims, at least for the past couple of years. Many of these cases were reported to the police direct.'* [Tracy, a social worker with 25 years' experience working with community-dwelling older people]

As with some instances of financial abuse, the picture with regard to potential sexual abuse was complicated by a reluctance to 'expose' it by older people, especially if it involved a spouse. Tracy recounts the experiences of a colleague below:

*'I heard from my colleague that there was a case involving an older couple, both were near 70 years old. The husband had been away and moved back to the mainland more than 15 years. He returned after all those years and wanted to be with the wife again. The wife was reluctant. During a home visit, my social worker colleague suspected that the old woman might have been sexually assaulted. The older woman did not deny nor admit it. But no matter what, the older woman refused to take this matter any further, and requested the social worker not report it as she would rather die...' [Tracy, a social worker with 25 years' experience working with older people]*

This example suggests that the number of potentially serious cases of sexual abuse of older people may be under-reported within the Chinese community, possibly due to the perceived shame and loss of face that it would bring on the family.

This section has considered professionals' views as to what might constitute elder abuse and has raised some interesting paradoxes. Therefore, whilst an 'official' definition exists and professionals consider that they take a relatively objective view of what constitutes abuse, in reality the issue is far from clear-cut. As with older people, professionals seemed to draw on a range of 'expectations' against which they 'evaluate' behaviours when making judgements about abuse.

However, unlike the older people whose 'expectations' and 'evaluations' were based on traditional beliefs and values about filial piety, the professionals drew on a range of factors including their professional background and experiences and their beliefs about what might be considered to be 'reasonable' behaviour

based on ‘*common sense*’ understandings. As with older people, they often sought to ‘*explain/excuse*’ a behaviour based on these evaluations before labelling it as abuse. The largely subjective nature of many forms of abuse is neatly captured by Ada below:

*‘Different individuals may have different perceptions of elder abuse... For professionals, their perceptions, sensitivity or awareness of potential elder abuse cases affect how they take the case to the next step in handling. I mean in reality, things may not appear as clear-cut as what we see. Say, for a case of isolation / neglect, it can well be a case of elder abuse, and yet, it may not be so. [Ada, a nurse with 20 years’ experience working with community-dwelling older people]*

Some of these factors and how professionals respond to elder abuse is explored below.

#### **6.4 Professional participants’ perspectives on dealing with elder abuse**

As the data analysis revealed, professional participants might categorize abuse as falling into a number of categories: physical abuse – causing bodily harm / injury to older persons; neglecting or ignoring the basic living needs of dependent or needy older people; harming their psychological well-being; abandoning older people in a care home; exploiting older people’s assets or property; and sexual abuse. Whilst their views were not homogeneous, professionals followed similar processes to older people when ‘*evaluating*’ actions and potentially ‘*explaining/excusing*’ them before deciding if abuse had occurred and action was needed. The previously cited example of the older man caring for his incontinent wife highlights the type of ‘*evaluations*’ that

professionals would make:

*'... We usually visit older people at home and examined whether the basic cares have been met, for instance, food, and personal hygiene. But we are careful to differentiate 'good care' from 'basic care'.... We cannot push too far in reality. In a recent case, a husband was 80+ himself, he provided basic cares to his post-stroke wife, she was fed and changed periodically... but he used newspaper instead of napkin to handle her incontinence... is that elder abuse? We thought it was improper care, but not elder abuse, given the basics were there and he did what he thought he could...'*  
[Wing Sum, a nurse with 7 years' experience working with community-dwelling older people]

Clearly, there is an element of judgement in deciding what it is 'reasonable' to expect the husband to achieve in the example above and such subtle judgements took into account the context in which a behaviour occurred and compared the behaviour with a set of, often implicit, 'expectations'. Indeed, in some cases it was difficult to judge who was abusing whom:

*'... I was visiting an elderly couple, they were both 80+. The wife was wheelchair bounded after a stroke; her spouse took care of her. Sometimes she could be quite abusive verbally, towards her husband. And that occasion, the husband was so angry that he attempted to hit her with a wooden chair... of course we stopped it from happening. But that incident made you think who is abusing whom...?' [Wong, a community nurse with 9 years' experience working with community-dwelling older people]*

When 'evaluating' potentially abusive behaviours professionals would also search for alternative 'explanations' or judge if a behaviour was 'reasonable'



or understandable in a given situation. For example, Tracy, a social worker, described an incident in which she witnessed a son being very abrupt and using sentences full of foul language when talking to his older parents who appeared sad and in distress. However, they responded using similarly foul language and she reasoned that this was perhaps 'normal' behaviour within this family:

*'Sometimes I think it (potentially abusive behaviour) may well stem from the usual family behaviours in managing their relationships' [Tracy, a social worker had 25 years' experience working with older people].*

The above provides an example of how professionals might 'adjust' their 'expectations' in light of the circumstances. The data also suggested that such 'adjustments' were also occurring in a wider context and in part explained why professionals' views, when compared with those of older people, drew less on traditional values such as filial piety:

*'I used to think family should take the responsibility to keep older parents at home for as long as possible, as we believed that home is the best place for ageing... But this is true only when home is really the best place for their ageing. Many youngsters need to work long hours during daytime. After work, they then pick up another job: take care of older persons at home. This can be very stressful, for both sides. In that case, is home still the best place for ageing? ...many things worked in the past have changed - our family structure, work hours, and even living environment.' [Ling, a community nurse with 26 years' experience working with older people]*

From the data, it was clear that a complex array of factors came into play before a professional would decide to intervene in a case of potential abuse. Even if

an act was deemed abusive, rather than take punitive action immediately, other options (except in the most extreme cases) were nearly always considered first. These might include providing information and training: adopting a ‘*wait and see*’ approach; or seeking to empower the older person.

### ***Providing information and training***

If family members or others (usually paid domestic help) were judged to be failing to provide ‘*acceptable*’ care to the older person due to the lack of relevant knowledge/skills or resources then the professionals indicated that their first form of intervention was to provide information and resources as needed.

*‘To me, I think the man [who uses newspapers instead of napkins to handle his wife’s incontinence] was probably lack of training and knowledge. And maybe short of money as well. In that case, the best way is not to punish him but to provide the resources so that he can improve the care...’  
[Ada, a nurse with 20 years’ experience]*

*‘I have seen some foreign domestic helpers who had obviously received no particular training in taking care of older persons. They sometimes get frustrated and mad at the older care-recipients, physically rough when tendering care... letting them know the proper way to do their job is important.’ [Helen, a social worker with 10+ years’ experience]*

In such cases professionals would ‘*wait and see*’ if their advice had been heeded and the care improved accordingly. If there were no change then the team would file it as an abuse case and refer it on for action, usually to the specialist social worker. This of course required agreement amongst the team themselves, and this was not necessarily a straightforward matter as the differing perspectives

that have already been described demonstrate. In such cases a team conference was sometimes needed to deliberate on the case.

Given the growing numbers of older people, many of whom lived alone or at some distance from their families, professionals also saw a need to try and empower older people themselves:

*'Many a time when we do 'floor sweeping', meaning going door by door to visit every single older resident living in our estate, we find them alone at home. Some of them feeling rejected by the communities and retreat into aloneness. Their family might not be able to take them out and they are too frail to do so by themselves. But they feel lonely and sometimes depressed. This could be another type of abuse, you know. ...we need to deal with their inadequate capabilities, network deficiency, and lack of self-reliance beliefs. We set up elder-friendly neighbour support groups. They seem more willing to network and speak up... that looks a good way to go.'* [Ethan, a social worker with 10 years' experience]

The above quote reinforces the growing recognition amongst professional participants of the need to raise the profile of the abuse/neglect of older people amongst the population as a whole:

*'I think we should act earlier before elder abuse actually occurs. The general public needs to understand the normal ageing process, to know what can happen when a human body grows old, and to respect older persons' values. People generally perceive old means weak, silly, slow... you know, all sorts of negative images may attach to older people. Public needs to learn and pay more respect to aged population; to understand that it is normal to move slower*

*as one ages. A higher level of endurance is needed in our community.' [Tracy, a social worker with 25 years' experience]*

This suggests the importance of taking preventative action before abuse occurs but for many of the professionals involved this was a rather distant dream as the reality was that the issue of abuse was still not a widely recognised nor given the resources it needed within the existing official responses. This was seen to limit the range of potential interventions with the inference being that sometimes marginal cases were not explored further:

*'I think the issue of elder abuse has not been, and still is not being addressed properly in the community. Even the government – the Social Welfare Department, has not paid adequate attention to it. The mode and resources allocated to deal with this problem is limited and it affects staff morale and attitude. With limited manpower and increasing number of older people needing our service, we can only be passive and sometimes non-intervening ... we just don't have the time to explore further in case of suspected abuse.'* [Daisy, a nurse with 18 years' experience working with older people]

The above section has shown that unless a case of suspected abuse was severe professionals rarely turned to punitive action as their first response. Rather, they would seek to explore other options first. But in reality their choice of response as limited by a lack of resources and attention given to the issue of elder abuse. This will be explored further in the discussion chapter.

Throughout this chapter so far, a number of differences between the perceptions of older people and those of professionals on the question of elder abuse have been touched upon. These will be explored in more detail below.

## **6.5 Comparing and contrasting the views of the two groups**

One of the primary aims of this study was not only to identify how elder abuse is perceived both by community-dwelling older people and professionals who are likely to deal with elder abuse in their day to day practice, but to explore how they would potentially respond to the situation. As has been shown in the preceding pages both older people and professionals identified broadly similar types of abuse. There was general agreement in both groups that the most obvious form of abuse was physical abuse. However, potentially important differences in what was perceived as being the most hurtful type of abuse and who was the most likely perpetrator emerged.

### ***What was the most hurtful type of abuse?***

Whilst an affront to the older person's dignity was likely to be viewed as potentially abusive by both groups important differences emerged. For professionals, dignity was viewed largely in the context of the care that the older person received. Care that was considered to fall below an '*acceptable*' standard was seen as an affront to the older person's dignity. Conversely, for older people dignity was viewed almost exclusively in the context of their role, position and value within the family. Acts that were perceived to limit their role and/or to exclude them from family life were viewed as the most hurtful of all forms of abuse.

### ***Who might be the abuser?***

Professionals saw either male spouses or sons as being the most likely family members to resort to abuse, especially if their '*superior*' position in the family was seen to be under threat. This was deemed by professionals to be largely

about exerting power within family relationships.

Older people, on the other hand, rarely identified spouses as potential abusers and were more likely to look for a reason to ‘*explain/excuse*’ potentially abusive behaviour from sons. In the vast majority of cases, daughters-in-law were seen to be guilty of such acts:

*‘...I believe most of the abusers in elder abuse cases involve daughter-in-law... must be more than 99%, I tell you...Sons and daughters are less likely to abuse their own folks. Unlike daughters-in-law who don’t often share the same level of love and respect for the older members in the family.’ [Peter, aged 72, abandoned by his wife]*

*‘To me, mostly it is the daughter-in-law (who is the abuser). You know daughters-in-law are not the same as ones’ own children. When they are obliged to move in to live with a ‘stranger’ older person as a result of marriage, you can imagine the tension can be quite intense for both sides.’ [Rita, aged 82, financially abused by niece]*

Furthermore, the data analysis revealed that older participants seldom thought the abuser could be an older person. They believed that one older person would not abuse another older person. Their views on this aspect was clear:

*‘Spouses can talk to each other, communicate with each other... and would not abuse each other...’ [Wendy, aged 74, had witnessed abuse]*

*‘...oh, certainly not. Both are old in the case; how could that be elder abuse? No. Older person cannot abuse another older person’. [Bill, 76, abused by daughter-in-law]*

Unlike their counterparts, professional participants in the study recognised spouses as abusers, often using both physical and verbal:

*'...a spouse may also be the abuser in elder abuse. From my observations, spousal abuses between older couples often involves physical and/or verbal abuses. Especially when one of them is chronically ill.'* [Tracy, a social worker with 25 years' working experience with older people]

The potentially abusive actions of daughters-in-law were seen to be compounded if the older person's son did nothing to address the situation. In most cases such disrespect was targeted at mothers-in-law, with there being few instances of this type in relation to fathers-in-law. The data suggested that older mothers-in-law had clear 'expectations' of what they had a 'right' to expect from their daughters-in-law. These 'expectations' which may not accorded with the views of the daughter-in-law herself:

*'...a daughter-in-law has an obligation [now that she has taken up the name of the family] to take care of older persons at home. They need to fulfil such a duty... so it is unfilial and abusive of the daughter-in-law, not to take good care of her older parents-in-law at home.'* [Bonnie, 65, bullied by neighbour]

However, the degree of hurt that a perceived failure to live up to expectations caused was in no doubt:

*'My daughter-in-law does not respect me the way she should... she is mean and cold to me... It is invisible. It is like a needle hidden in a pile of cotton. You don't get to see it, but it hurts you the most.'* [Ulla, 79, abused by daughter-in-law]

Once again, this can be understood as a manifestation of changing power relations within family dynamics. However, it perhaps also reflects differing '*expectations*' between generations regarding how traditional Chinese values should shape family dynamics. This is something that will be considered in more detail below.

Differences in perception about the part to be played by traditional Chinese values in modern day Hong Kong may also help to explain why professionals were less likely to see conflicts between older people and daughters-in-law as *de facto* abusive. Consequently, it was difficult for professionals to see the '*hidden needle*' as a form of elder abuse rather than a clash of personalities.

#### ***Intent vs outcome***

Another interesting difference in the thought processes of older people and professionals related to the question of '*intent*' as opposed to '*outcome*'. In the eyes of the older people, if a family member acted out of good intent, even if it resulted in a negative consequence for the older person, they were not likely to see the act as abusive. In judging a daughter's reason for taking money from her diabetic mother in order to stop her from buying and consuming 'sweets', Peter argued it was motivated by a good '*intent*':

*'... The daughter is doing that in order to help her forgetful and diabetic mother. To keep her safe and healthy, you know, it is out of her good intent for her wellbeing...'*  
[Peter, aged 72, abandoned by wife]

Professionals, on the other hand, tended to give more weight to the *consequence* or *outcome* of an act when determining whether it was abusive or not. They did not consider it '*reasonable*' to base their judgement about an act primarily on



the basis of intent *per se*:

*‘...I think me and my colleagues as well, would judge a case by looking at the outcome of the course of action. Many a time, wrong acts are performed out of ‘good intent’, ending in bad outcomes. So ‘intent ’by itself is not a reasonable basis on which to make judgement in potential case of elder abuse’ [Frances, social worker, 24 years’ experience working with community-dwelling older people]*

### ***Views on types of abuse***

Professionals had a wider and more sophisticated perception of financial abuse than did older people, with older men being seen to be particularly vulnerable to the rapidly emerging ‘scam’ termed by the professionals who had witnessed it as ‘young wives/old husband’ financial abuse.

The older people were very reluctant to raise the issue of sexual abuse, particularly if it was between spouses and whilst professionals were more aware of sexual abuse few had direct personal experience of it as any serious cases were reported directly to the police. So much for the types of potential abuse identified. Attention is now turned to how to respond to abuse.

### ***Responding to elder abuse - similarities and dissimilarities***

As described above when making decisions about what constituted abuse older people and professionals used broadly similar processes of: ‘Evaluating’ a behaviour using certain (often implicit) ‘expectations’; and subsequently considering the rationale or intent behind a behaviour in order to determine if it was possible to ‘explain/excuse’ it. Even if an act was seen as potentially

abusive older people often chose to '*endure*' rather than '*expose*' a potentially abusive behaviour.

They did this for a number of reasons such as fearing the consequences of reporting it (for example, having to live alone or the perpetrator facing punitive action), the desire to maintain family harmony or because of the social stigma and the potential '*loss of face*' that the older person and wider family might be exposed to. Therefore, for both groups, and despite professionals supposedly working to an '*official*' definition, assigning abuse was a complex and often subjective process underpinned by a set of subtle and, frequently implicit, beliefs. It was here that, despite the apparent similarities in the types of abuse identified, potentially important differences between the perceptions of older people and those of professionals emerged.

When making their '*evaluations*' older people drew on long held traditional Chinese beliefs, especially those to do with filial piety. These provided a set of moral guidelines about how families should behave towards their older members. Embedded in such expectations were the traditional Chinese adages such as '*Old is Gold*' or '*An elder in the home is like a treasure*' (in Chinese: 家有一老, 如有一寶). It was such values that older participants still held dear, although some were aware that these traditional beliefs were now being eroded. Other traditional Chinese values, such as those relating to '*losing face*', also played a major role in the likelihood of older people reporting abuse with maintaining family harmony being a particularly powerful force which inhibited some older people from reporting abuse:

*'I think maintaining family harmony is the first and most important thing to do (when facing potentially abusive*

*situations). Good family relationship can ease off the pain from many unavoidable disputes or tension within a family. When a family is working together, things would not get too ugly ...' [Ida, 68, speaking hypothetically]*

In order to maintain family harmony older people would often 'endure' what they saw as abuse:

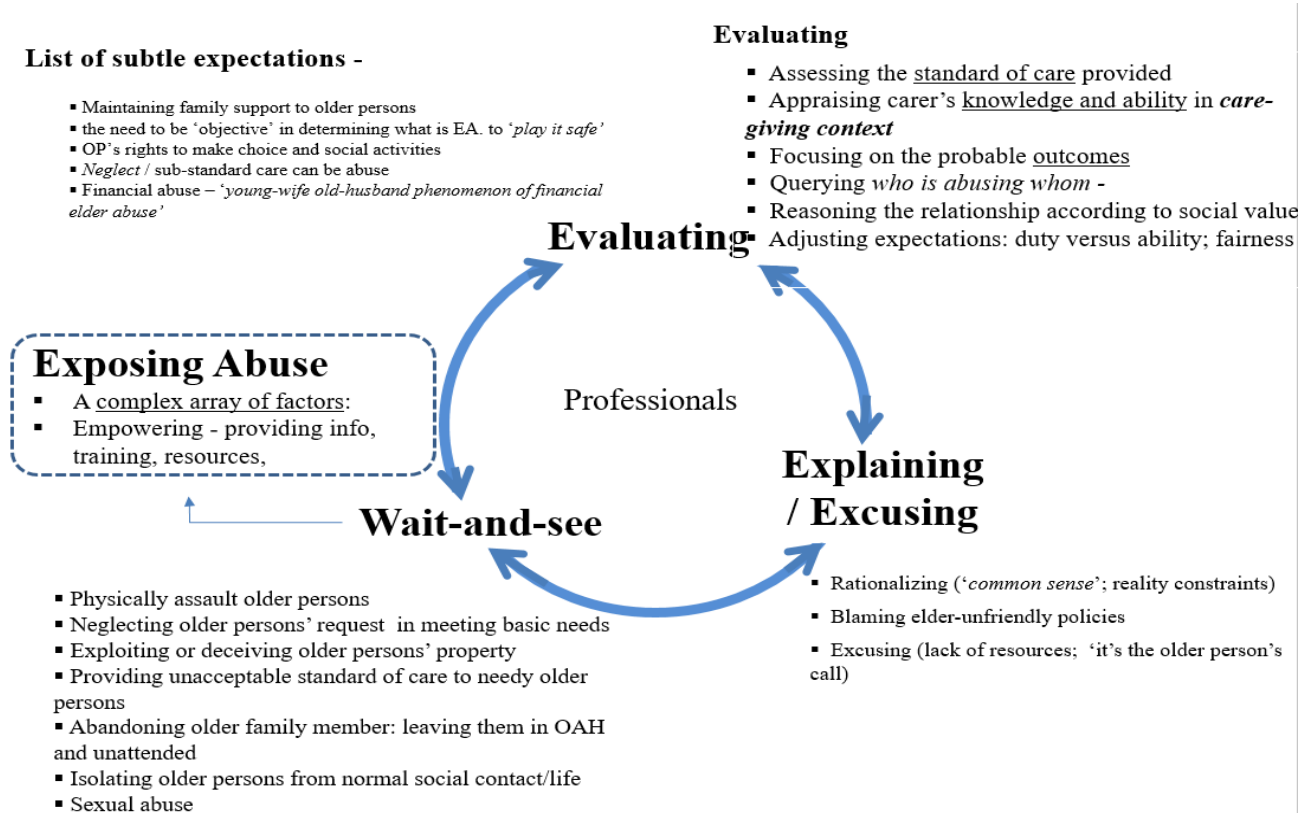
*'...I am of course not happy with her bad manner toward me. But I need to put up with that. I won't argue... I hate arguing. My son would be placed in a difficult position if I argue with her. I rather put up with it. I don't want to see my family arguing all the times.' [Pam, 78, abused by son and husband]*

Whilst professionals were aware of the importance that older people placed on values such as maintaining family harmony, they felt that an abusive situation could not be ignored even if this was what the older person wanted:

*With years of experience of working with older people, I do understand that they regard keeping family in a unity as extremely important. However, not in the face of elder abuse... If we noticed something which was not right – say seeing older person's personal rights being deprived, we cannot keep it to ourselves. [Ada, a community nurse with 20 years' working experience with older people]*

On the other hand when professionals were 'evaluating' a behaviour their judgements were based on a number of factors including: their professional background and training; personal professional experience; and beliefs about what constituted 'acceptable' care based on both 'common sense' beliefs and what they considered it was 'reasonable' to expect in a given set of circumstances (see Figure 6.1).

**Figure 6.1 The relationship between the processes of *evaluating-explaining-wait-and-see/exposing* abuse among professional participants**



Many professionals were aware that long held traditional Chinese cultural beliefs were being questioned in modern day Hong Kong. For example the quote below from Wing Sum raises questions about the 'reasonableness' of traditional expectations of sons, and whether it is 'fair' to expect them to be able to live up to the expectations of their older parents:

*'We need to ask is it really the son's obligation to co-habit with his older parents? Our older parents are special; but they still expect that their adult son should continue to live with them after he got married. And if they don't, they would think or blame him for being unfilial...but have they thought of his ability in reality?' [Wing Sum, a community nurse with 7 years' working experience with older people]*

Such differing expectations were also apparent when placing a parent in a care home. Some community-based professionals were genuinely shocked to hear that a number of older people considered this as a form of abuse, as Betty describes below:

*'... they do (consider it as abuse)? I can understand if they don't feel happy about such an idea (having to spend their last years in a nursing home instead of own home). But I have never thought they thought of it so strongly, elder abuse? Oh my God, I have registered my old dad with a nursing home lately, haven't told him yet..., but I really cannot manage his care after his recent stroke.'* [Betty, a nurse with 26 years' working experience with community-dwelling older people]

## **6.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the perceptions of what professionals think constitutes elder abuse and has identified the largely subjective nature of the issue. Whilst they identified broadly similar 'types' of abuse to older people there were subtle, but potentially important, differences in emphasis.

Despite these differences similar processes of 'evaluating' actions against 'expectations', and seeking to 'explain/excuse' potentially abusive behaviours were in evidence amongst both older people and professionals. However, for a variety of reasons many older people chose to 'endure' rather than 'expose' elder abuse, adding a further layer of complexity.

The next chapter seeks to explore these various processes further and in so doing present, as far as is possible, an integrated theory of elder abuse based on the data collected from older people and health and social care professionals.

## CHAPTER 7

### **BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER: A MID-RANGE THEORY ON THE MEANING OF, AND RESPONSES TO, ELDER ABUSE AMONG COMMUNITY-DWELLING OLDER PEOPLE AND HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE PROFESSIONALS IN HONG KONG**

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#### **7.1 Introduction**

The two preceding chapters have presented the perceptions of community-dwelling older people and health and social care professionals in Hong Kong about what elder abuse means to them and how they might respond to it. The final section of the preceding chapter began to identify similarities and differences in perception between the two groups and this chapter takes this process a stage further. Its main aim is to present, as far as it is possible, an integrated mid-range theory of elder abuse in Hong Kong and to identify the main processes in operation. It will also in part consider the extent to which the foreshadowed questions that informed the study at its outset have been met.

These foreshadowed questions were underpinned by a range of sensitising concepts that drew on multiple forms of knowledge: my own background and experience; the limited knowledge of elder abuse available in public forums in Hong Kong; and the research and grey literature that existed when the study began (see Chapter 3 for a fuller consideration of this). These foreshadowed questions are reproduced below:

1. What are the perceptions of what constitutes elder abuse among a sample of Chinese community-dwelling participants aged 65 or over?
2. What beliefs about help-seeking behaviours are there among a sample of community-dwelling participants aged 65 or over faced with potentially abusive situations?

3. What are the perceptions of what constitutes elder abuse and what current interventions are employed among a sample of professionals (social workers and/or community nurses)?
4. Based on the above is it possible to generate a ‘theory’ informing a better understanding of elder abuse among community-dwelling Chinese older people and professionals in Hong Kong that can be used to raise awareness and shape interventions?

In addressing these questions, I sought not only to add to understanding but also to generate insights that had the potential to inform interventions that might help to address the issue of elder abuse. To achieve this I adopted a constructivist grounded theory approach as discussed in Chapter 4. This was deemed the most appropriate methodology for a number of reasons.

Firstly, grounded theory (Glaser 1978, 1992; Glaser and Strauss 1967), as described in Chapter 4, is a methodology that seeks to understand the social processes operating within social structures and is attentive to issues of interpretation without being tied to existing theories and assumptions. This was considered to be particularly important in my study as most of the existing work on elder abuse is based on research conducted in Western countries. This, I argued (see Chapters 2 and 3), did not necessarily take adequate account of a Chinese cultural context.

Secondly, in addition to adding to knowledge, grounded theory seeks to generate insights that are likely to have application in the ‘*real*’ world (Charmaz 2006). This was one of the main goals of my study. Thirdly, I wanted the participants’ views to be ‘*centre stage*’ and this suggested a constructivist approach.

In considering the four initial foreshadowed questions above, the preceding two chapters have presented the findings with respect to questions 1, 2 and 3. The focus of this chapter is on question 4, that is: *based on the perceptions of community-dwelling older people health and social care professionals, is it possible to generate a 'theory' informing a better understanding of elder abuse among these groups that can be used to raise awareness and shape interventions?*

This chapter will attempt to bring together the resultant 'theory', with the extent to which it might be used to raise awareness and shape interventions being considered in the final chapter. Grounded theory essentially produces mid- range substantive theories that address a certain phenomenon in a given context, in my case an understanding of elder abuse among two groups living/working in Hong Kong. In doing so grounded theory seeks to identify the main (sometimes termed 'basic') social processes that explain how a phenomenon operates in a given context, ideally with reference to a primary or 'core' category that lies at the heart of the theory. It is worth noting that early proponents of grounded theory, particularly Glaser (1978), argued that, by definition, only **one** 'core' category can be identified. Later authors such as Charmaz (2006) contended that in an increasingly complex world, multiple processes might be operating with a number being equally important. Therefore, for her more than one core category might conceivably be identified.

According to Glaser (1978, 2005), the 'core' category is the one that has the best conceptual fit with the data and the most explanatory power. Consequently, other processes in the theory should relate closely to it and it should only be possible to fully understand how these processes operate with reference to the



core category (Glaser 2005). In terms of the properties of a core category Charmaz (2006) holds similar views and differs only in rejecting Glaser's (1978) belief that it is possible to identify only one such category. The stance taken by Clarke and Friese (2007) seems to summarise the purpose of a core category well. They propose that a core category should identify "*the key forms of action undertaken by participants in a particular situation*" (Clarke and Friese 2007, p.363). That is what the core category in the theory that follows hopefully achieves.

This chapter will not further consider the 'types' of elder abuse described in Chapters 5 and 6 but will instead focus on the main processes that lie at the heart of the theory. It will be argued below that one process, that of 'evaluating', can be considered as the 'core' category, as this not only framed participants' perceptions of, and the meanings attributed to, elder abuse but was key to understanding how the other processes in the theory namely: 'explaining/excusing'; 'enduring' (for older people) and 'exposing', operated.

## **7.2 'Evaluating': The key to understanding participants' perceptions of, and responses to elder abuse**

As highlighted in the preceding two chapters, identifying an agreed definition of elder abuse amongst the participants proved elusive. True, there was some consensus amongst older people and professionals as to the broad 'types' of behaviours that might be considered abusive, but there were also subtle and important differences in interpretation both between and within these groups. For both groups, even amongst professionals who notionally worked to an 'official' definition of elder abuse, deciding if a behaviour was abusive was essentially a largely subjective process. The data showed that deciding if a given

act was seen as abusive or not involved a complex series of judgements that were made with reference to a set of, often implicit, ‘*expectations*’. This process was termed ‘*evaluating*’. It was the differences in people’s ‘*expectations*’ and how behaviour was ‘*evaluated*’ with respect to those ‘*expectations*’ that largely explained the varying perceptions of elder abuse, both between older people and professionals and, to a lesser extent, amongst older people and professionals themselves.

‘*Evaluating*’ therefore can be seen as the ‘*core*’ category as it was not only the starting point in determining if a given behaviour was abusive or not but was also linked with all the subsequent processes. However, despite its pivotal role neither older people nor professionals were always consciously aware of making any such ‘*evaluation*’ and the ‘*expectations*’ against which they framed their judgements were often implicit. In the context of this theory, ‘*evaluating*’ is therefore defined as:

***‘The largely subjective and usually tacit process, of judging a behaviour as potentially abusive by comparing it against a set of, often implicit, expectations’.***

In order to fully understand the process of ‘*evaluating*’ it is therefore necessary to have an appreciation of the range of ‘*expectations*’ that informed people’s judgements. It is to this area that attention is now turned.

In common usage, one definition of the term ‘*expectation*’ refers to it as the belief that something positive will happen in the future. For example, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, ‘*expectation*’ is defined as the ‘...*feeling that good things are going to happen in the future* ([www.dictionary.cambridge.org](http://www.dictionary.cambridge.org)).

accessed 16 August 2017). However, it is the definition provided by the Collins Dictionary that is more appropriate in the current context. Here expectations are defined as the ‘*strong beliefs of a person about the proper way someone should behave or something should happen*’ (www.collinsdictionary.com. accessed 16 August 2017, my emphasis).

As described in the previous two chapters it is just such strong (if often implicit) beliefs that provided the foundations upon which both older people and professionals made their ‘*evaluations*’ of potentially abusive behaviours. Therefore, the definition of expectations above from the Collins Dictionary will provide the basis for the one adopted here. In the substantive theory of elder abuse to emerge from my data ‘*expectations*’ play a central role and are defined as follows:

*‘A person’s expectations are based on strongly held, if often tacit, beliefs about the proper way someone should behave or act in a given context’.*

The inclusion of the word ‘*proper*’ in the above definition is highly relevant because the belief that there is a ‘*proper*’ or ‘*reasonable*’ way to behave in a given context is central, not only to an individual’s initial ‘*evaluations*’ but also to subsequent processes, such as ‘*explaining/excusing*’. Whilst the differences between the ‘*expectations*’ of older people and professionals have already been touched upon, these are considered in greater detail in the section below.

### **7.2.1 Exploring the differing ‘*expectations*’ of older people and professionals**

As described in Chapters 5 and 6 the ‘*expectations*’ that older people and professionals hold about the way that someone (largely younger family

members) should behave with respect to an older family member came from a variety of differing sources. For older people such ‘*expectations*’ derived primarily from three main sources, these were:

- Traditional Chinese value systems, often stemming back hundreds of years, with filial piety exerting a particularly powerful influence
- The values older people had learned during their upbringing and the values that they had sought to instill in their own children
- The patterns of behaviour and relationships that had evolved over time in a given family.

As noted previously, the above values/beliefs were often tacit and operated implicitly within each family. They are also inherently subjective. At the heart of these values was the need to for younger family members to ‘*respect*’ the older person. ‘*Respect*’ was an ill-defined but multi-faceted concept involving: the way that an older person should be treated; what they expected of the younger family members; the position that they held in the family; and the roles that they fulfilled. Not to show an older person the ‘*respect*’ that they believed that they deserved was seen as the most hurtful, but elusive, type of abuse:

*‘What is elder abuse? I think, if for example, (younger persons) shouting at elderly, treating them in a disrespectful way, all these, would be considered as elder abuse. I don’t know how to describe it, but it is potent and hurtful to us.’*  
[Queenie, 65]

To complicate matters, these ‘*expectations*’ were not necessarily applied uniformly. For example, as already described, it seemed that mothers-in-law in particular held what might be seen as a more ‘*rigorous*’ set of ‘*expectations*’ of their daughters-in-law than they did of their sons. This might in part explain

why the family member most likely to be seen as abusive by older people was the daughter-in-law. The stronger the ‘*expectation*’ that an individual held the more hurt they felt if they believed that they were not being accorded the respect they were due. As the ‘*new*’ member of the family, there were ‘*expectations*’ that a daughter-in-law should show both warmth and respect towards their mother-in-law:

Interviewer: ‘*what happened that made you consider your daughter-in-law might have abused you?*’

Participant: ‘*she showed no respect... no respect for older person. [Sighed and kept silent for a while]. She has never greeted me since the day she moved into our house after getting married with my youngest son. It is very unfilial. I feel I am being despised, just like a piece of old furniture ... As we get older, we don’t get any respect from the young people anymore. Not like the old days anyway.*’ [Danny, 80, abused by daughter-in-law]

A key part of showing ‘*respect*’ was according the older person a ‘*voice*’ in the family and respecting their opinion. The ‘*expectation*’ was that children, even upon reaching adulthood, should listen to their parents’ advice on important life decisions, such as choosing a job, getting married, and so on. Daughters-in-law were expected to ‘*join*’ the husband’s family and serve their parents-in-law according to *li* (禮 - rite). As the data analysis revealed, many of the older participants considered their daughters-in-law did not meet this ‘*expectation*’. This was seen as abuse, particularly when the daughter-in-law was judged to have usurped the older person’s position:

*It’s so disappointing....She (the daughter-in-law) said even though the flat we are residing is under my name,*

*since they (the son and the daughter-in-law) are paying the rent, therefore they are in charge in the family. I cannot use the bathroom the way I want. I used to hang my dripping clothes in the bathtub after bathing, but my daughter-in-law bars me from doing so. I feel I am inferior to the rest of the family even we are under the same roof, and I am the eldest one there in the family...'* [Ulla, 79, abused by son]

Importantly the 'expectations' older people had were applied largely to younger family members. Very few older people considered elder abuse to be primarily an issue between two older people themselves, especially between spouses.

It was also interesting to note that 'expectations' were not uniformly held. It seemed that those older people who felt the most strongly that younger people should obey seniors' instructions on important life events were more likely to find it abusive if such 'expectations' were not met, as the quote below illustrates:

*'And what hurts me the worst is the way my daughter-in-law treats me. She never listens to me! You know, my son earns only a fairly low income. But that should be good enough for the family if she knows how to manage it well. However, she wouldn't listen to my advice, she just spends money too loosely, and wastes too much... that is not right. I don't like it at all. (...) And when I lecture her on this, she always talks back... it's a very bad manner.'* [Sue, 71, abused by daughter-in-law]

It is noteworthy that whilst the professionals were aware of the importance older people attached to notions of filial piety, there was a feeling that some 'expectations' were now becoming outdated and unreasonable. Indeed such a clash in 'expectations' between the generations was seen as a potential starting

point for deteriorating family relationships and possibly abuse:

*'I understand many older people wish their younger family members do things according to their way, but I think it is silly... because younger ones are more educated compared to our generation, and they have a different set of values... it's difficult to make them do things or follow our old track if they do not want to. And if no one backs off, the relationship is bound to turn sour... that is often the starting point of elder abuse in many situations. [Betty, RN, with 26 years' experience working with older people]*

Therefore although the inherent subjectivity that many older people employed when defining elder abuse was recognised by several professionals, many believed that the traditional filial '*expectations*' that older people had of their younger family members were no longer '*reasonable*' in today's modern society. Consequently, the type of '*hidden needle*' abuse seen as the most hurtful by numerous older people was not seen as abuse by many professionals.

In contrast, most professionals believed that they took a more objective stance to elder abuse. In reality however, whilst they were in theory working with an '*official*' definition of elder abuse, their own '*expectations*' were also influenced by a number of, largely subjective, factors. These were, in addition to the '*official*' definition:

- Their professional training and experience
- Their judgements about what it was '*reasonable*' both for an older person to expect of their family and for a younger family member to provide for their older relative
- In deciding what could be considered as '*reasonable*', professionals

drew both on their beliefs about what was ‘*acceptable*’ care and what could be seen as a ‘*common sense*’ response to a given situation.

It was these differences between older peoples’ ‘*expectations*’, based largely on traditional Chinese values and family mores, and those of the professionals, based on a combination of professionally informed beliefs about ‘*reasonable*’ behaviour and ‘*acceptable*’ care that framed the way these groups ‘*evaluated*’ a potentially abusive behaviour.

For older people, abuse was something that occurred largely within the context of family relationships and dynamics and was not necessarily closely associated with the physical act of providing care and assistance. Older people therefore had ‘*expectations*’ that younger family members would provide for their ‘*basic*’ needs and were disappointed if these were not met. However, such deficits could often be ‘*explained/excused*’ (see below). It was in situations where older people felt that they were being deliberately excluded from family life or their position was ignored that the most hurtful, but hidden, type of abuse was seen to occur.

Conversely, professionals were far more likely to cast abuse into the context of care delivery, ‘*evaluating*’ the care given against what they perceived to be ‘*acceptable*’ standards. This is captured in the exchange below:

Researcher: “*Based on what sort of criteria do your team decide whether it is an elder abuse case or not?*”

Participant: “*...we usually start by examining whether he/she provides the basic support to assist older persons’ basic needs of living. That is fundamental. If we find that the*



*carer provides the necessary basic care to the older person in question, for instance, preparing food, feeding her, changing her when needed, and providing her with a reasonably clean environment to live in... then we would be unlikely to consider abuse, even if sometimes, the care provided may not be considered by some as "good care". [Ada, a community nurse with 20 years' working experience with older persons]*

Again, the element of subjectivity in this judgement is evident.

Notwithstanding these differences in 'expectations' when 'evaluating' whether a behaviour was abusive both groups went through a series of similar, often implicit, steps. In so doing they posed a number of 'evaluative' questions. These were as follows.

- Does this behaviour meet my 'expectations'? (as informed by the 'criteria' for both groups described above). If the answer was 'yes', then no potential abuse was seen to have taken place. If the answer was 'no', then a second level of 'evaluation' occurred which considered the following question;
- How far below my 'expectations' does this behaviour fall? If there was seen to be a considerable gap between 'expectations' and behaviour then abuse was much more likely to be considered. In certain instances, such as extreme violence, then abuse was often seen as self-evident. Even then, however, the abuse was not necessarily 'exposed' (See below for a definition) especially by older people. Prior to 'exposing' abuse a number of other processes, and a further series of evaluations, usually took place.

The next process was that of '*explaining/excusing*'. These are best viewed as being separate but related processes, with one closely linked to the other. Both involved an element of '*evaluating*', but this was less likely to be underpinned by filial beliefs and instead was more concerned with efforts to try and '*understand*' why a certain behaviour occurred.

### **7.3 '*Explaining/excusing*' – the next process**

Prior to labelling a behaviour as abusive another series of '*evaluations*' took place. If it was possible to find a '*reasonable explanation*' for a given behaviour then it might be possible to '*excuse*' it (especially if the behaviour was not frequent or repeated). If this was the case then it was not seen as abuse. Once again, subtle differences between older people and professionals emerged.

Older people, more so than professionals, often looked at the perceived '*intent*' behind an act. For example, if a potentially abusive behaviour was made with a '*kind heart*' then it was far less likely to be viewed as abusive and the act could be '*excused*'. Professionals, on the other hand, were more likely to consider the potential '*consequences*' of an act rather than its perceived intent.

Therefore, if an act was likely to have detrimental consequences for the older person, even if the original intention had been good, then it was far less likely to be '*excused*'.

Over and above intent, older people looked for other reasons that allowed them to '*explain/excuse*' a behaviour, for example the younger person being very busy and/or having several other demands on their time. Very occasionally, some older people sought to '*excuse*' the behaviour of a younger family member because it was an understandable response to unreasonable or inflexible

behaviour from the older person themselves:

*“I think many a time, when there is conflict in the family, if older people are more open-minded and able to take in different opinions of the younger ones, elder abuse might not happen or would be minimized considerably.... it is all about communication and endurance. Mutual understanding can be enhanced with more open and thorough communications among family members.” [Olivia, 65 years old, had witnessed elder abuse previously]*

In their efforts to ‘*explain/excuse*’ a potentially abusive behaviour, professionals were more inclined to draw on both professional ideals of what constituted ‘*acceptable*’ care and personal notions of what it was ‘*reasonable*’ to expect from a family member. The former were usually influenced by the professional background and training of the individual involved whereas the latter were more often informed by their personal beliefs and values. There was therefore greater variation in the latter than the former. In ‘*evaluating*’ whether it was possible to ‘*explain/excuse*’ a behaviour, professionals considered factors such as: could the act be understood in the light of previous and long established patterns of behaviour? Did the family member have the necessary resources and/or knowledge/understanding to deliver care of an ‘*acceptable*’ standard? Was the type/level of care ‘*expected*’ of the family member ‘*reasonable*’? The exchange below provides a flavour of this:

Interviewer: *‘what do you think if a son uses foul language and yells at his mother to demand something is done immediately?’*

Participant: *‘... hmm..., as a professional, I would not determine it as abuse right away. More context is required*

*to make a judgment in this case. Perhaps, for instance, this is the usual manner the family members communicates with one another. Or perhaps this was the contextual environment the son was brought up in? Although by definition, I believe it is a form of verbal abuse against an older person, if the sentences hurt the older person's feeling. But I don't feel that this is a strong case (of elder abuse).' [Ada, a community nurse with 20 years' experience working with community-dwelling older people]*

In 'evaluating' if a given level of care was 'acceptable' professionals considered both the level of knowledge and skills and the resources that the family had available to them available and, importantly the potential consequences of an act:

*Interviewer: 'Would you consider it elder abuse if an elderly woman with Parkinson's is placed on toilet seat for most of the day due to her incontinence?'*

*Participant: '... above all, we need to check if she develops pressure sores as a result of such inadequate care....Moreover, we need to investigate if the caregivers have any difficulties in caring for the client. For example, do they know the lifting techniques? Do they have the money to buy napkins for her use? etc.' [Betty, with 26 years' community nurse experience]*

In 'evaluating' if an instance of inadequate care actually constituted abuse, professionals considered a number of factors, often being able to 'excuse' care that they still considered to be below standard. This 'evaluation' would often determine what action was needed:

*'Hmm ... I would tend to consider this (where an old man*

*uses newspapers to deal with his wife's double incontinence) as inadequate / inappropriate care, rather than abuse. The caregiver in this case is an old person himself, to take care of his wife all by himself is a very heavy load, it would not be reasonable to judge that his inadequate care was elder abuse. He needs training and support, not accusation and punishment.' [Daisy, a nurse with 18 years' working experience with older people]*

As Ethan explains below there was a need to consider not only what is meant by 'reasonable' care but also what it is 'reasonable to expect of an older person:

*'True, we consider good care should be more than just meeting the basic needs, it should be carried out with good quality as well. However, we cannot push too far in reality ... we need to make a balance. It would be unfair to the caregiver to demand that he meets our own standard of care... he is very old too.' [Ethan, a social worker with 10 years' experience working with community-dwelling older people]*

'Evaluating' and 'explaining/excusing' are closely linked processes that largely determine whether an act is considered abusive or not. However the story does not end here and rather than 'expose' an abusive act many older people would chose to 'endure' it. The reasons for this are now considered.

#### **7.4 To 'endure' or 'expose' elder abuse?**

From the above it is clear that 'evaluating' whether a given behaviour can be 'explained/excused' is a complex but integral part of determining if abuse has occurred. If a behaviour could not be 'explained/excused' then it was far more likely to be seen as abusive. If a professional reached such a determination then

the course of action was usually obvious, the abuse needed to be '*exposed*'. Therefore, for professionals '*exposing*' was the next step in the process of dealing with elder abuse. But as the quote above illustrates, professional responses to elder abuse were far more likely to involve efforts to provide information and training or to empower older people (see chapter 6), rather than to take punitive action.

Whilst for professionals the decision to '*expose*' was often clear, older people usually made another very important additional '*evaluation*' before they were willing to '*expose*' abuse. This was because, for many, there was a fear that '*going public*' (by '*exposing*' abuse) would potentially involve '*exposing*' themselves to a number of potentially negative consequences. This dilemma can only be fully understood when the various dimensions of '*exposing*' within the theory have been made clear.

As with many words '*expose*' and '*exposing*' have various meanings, but perhaps few words have so many potentially negative connotations. A quick perusal of the Collins Dictionary online (<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/> accessed 15 August 2017) reveals that the word '*expose*' is often associated with terms such as '*objectionable*', '*bad*', '*immoral*', '*dangerous*' and '*unpleasant*'. Now whilst all of these adjectives can be seen to apply to elder abuse I gave very careful thought about using the concept of '*exposing*' as one of the key processes operating in the theory presented here. It was definitely not selected for its moral/pejorative dimensions but rather because it seemed to capture, in a single word, a number of complex '*evaluations*' that were made by older people before they sought help in an abusive situation.

Of the various commonly understood meanings of ‘*expose*’ identified in the Collins Dictionary online (accessed as above), the present theory draws on two that emerged from the data and were felt to capture the process of ‘*exposing*’ that the participants described. The first, and at face value, the most straightforward process of ‘*exposing*’ is concerned with ‘***making visible or uncovering something that is usually hidden***’. This is one of the key processes at operation in this theory. Elder abuse is, almost by definition, something that is usually hidden and even in countries where the existence of abuse is openly acknowledged it is widely accepted that the majority of abuse remains hidden. Hence the use of analogies such as ‘*tip of the iceberg*’ when talking about abuse in the literature. It is therefore self-evident that before it can be addressed, both at an individual and a societal level, elder abuse has to be ‘*exposed*’.

However, it is the second meaning of ‘*expose*’, that is critical to understanding why the older participants were so reluctant to ‘*expose*’ (as in ‘*make visible*’) their abuse. This second definition relates to ‘***increasing the risk that you are likely to experience an adverse outcome as a result of a given act***’. It was this meaning of to ‘*expose*’ that explained why many older people chose to ‘*endure*’ their abuse. This is considered below.

As described in Chapter 5, even after they had recognised that they were being abused (or potentially so for those participants taking hypothetically) many older people said that they would still not report the abuse and seek help. A few saw abuse as an inevitable consequence of ageing and therefore something they could do nothing about. They considered that they had no choice but to ‘*endure*’ it:

‘...you don’t have a lot of choice about it. You cannot get rid

*of it. When you get old, you have to rely on them (children or carers), you would probably get bullied one way or the other. It is a problem that comes with ageing – becoming useless.’ [Cindy, 81 years old, lived alone, had witnessed abuse]*

Others however, took a conscious and deliberate decision to ‘*endure*’ abuse based on a complex process of ‘*evaluating*’ the potentially negative consequences that they would ‘*expose*’ themselves to if they made their situation public. As with their initial set of ‘*expectations*’ the decision to ‘*endure*’ rather than ‘*expose*’ elder abuse was in large part shaped by traditional Chinese cultural values/beliefs. From the data it emerged that older people were concerned that ‘*exposing*’ their ‘*abuse*’ by bringing it out into the open might potentially ‘*expose*’ them (or their wider family) to a range of undesirable consequences. They consequently decided to ‘*endure*’ it. The consequences that they feared included:

- Disrupting family harmony. The desire to maintain harmonious relationships within the family is to traditional Chinese culture (Lee and Mok 2010). For centuries, Chinese people have lived in multigenerational households and this required them to establish and maintain interdependent relationships. For older people in the study such relationships were still seen as an integral part of family life and it was the desire to avoid disrupting such relationships and disturbing family harmony that motivated a number of older people to ‘*endure*’ their current, less than ideal situation. Lily explains this as follows:

*‘What to do in face of an abusive situation? This is really a difficult one ... it is not something we are proud of but it*



*would be too shameful to talk about this to strangers and it would make it very difficult to live together under the same roof once the harmony within a family is disturbed or injured.’ [Lily, 72, talking hypothetically]*

Some professionals were aware of the importance that older people attached to maintaining family harmony but did not necessarily see a disruption to such harmony as a form of abuse per se. Nevertheless they were aware that this might be an indication of tension within a family which could be a precursor to abuse. Furthermore, professionals were conscious of the fact that an older person’s desire to maintain family harmony or to protect another family member from censure could significantly reduce the chance of them reporting abuse. Ada describes the difficulties that professionals face when trying to identify potential cases of abuse:

*‘There is no easy way to ascertain a case of elder abuse from clinical presentation alone. It takes various sources. One source is of course when the older person reports it. But my experience tells me that very often, older people are not too keen, and in fact are, quite reluctant to report that they have been abused by family members. This can be due to their feeling of shamefulness and a sense of duty to protect family members from being punished as a result of their report.’*  
*[Ada, a community nurse with 25 years’ experience]*

- Even though, as noted above, older people who considered that they were being abused were living in a less than ideal situation this was preferable to some than living alone. Consequently rather than ‘*expose*’ themselves to the risk of being removed from the family for their own safety, older people might choose to ‘*endure*’ their abuse. A clear

illustration is evident in the example below:

*'We don't want quarrels in a family. It hurts both sides. Therefore, when it (elder abuse) occurs, it's better for older person to learn to be submissive and tolerant. Then at least one can still stay home with the family.'* [Danny, 80, abused by daughter-in-law]

- In all the cases of abuse that were cited, and the majority of the scenarios that were considered, it was another family member who was the potential perpetrator of the abuse. However, despite their harsh treatment of the older person many of the victims of abuse still had affection for the perpetrator, especially if it was a son. As a result, they feared that *'exposing'* the abuse by going to the authorities would *'expose'* their relative to negative consequences, such as prosecution. In such circumstances, some older people said that they would prefer to *'endure'* their abuse or to deny it to the authorities:

*'My friend has a son and she told me that he is a regular gambler (betting on horse-racing). He sometimes loses a lot and asks his mother for money. One time when she refused him, he pushed her and she got a broken leg. Their neighbour heard the loud argument and called the police. But when the police came, she refused to file a case to sue her son, fearing that he might be jailed for this.'* [Winnie, 80, neglected by son and daughter-in-law]

- The desire not to *'lose face'* is a powerful influence on a person's behaviour that is part of traditional Chinese culture. The concept of *'face'* is closely associated with a person's reputation and feeling of prestige. It is central to the position and standing one enjoys, and the

degree of respect one receives from society, peers and family. Older Chinese parents feel proud and gain 'face' when their children are filial towards them. If an older person was to report abuse to the authorities then there is little chance of keeping this 'secret' and every possibility that the wider family and community would become aware of their situation. This would involve a considerable 'loss of face', something that would be compounded if the abuser was a close family member. This situation was viewed as being 'shameful' by many older participants, even if they themselves were blameless victims. By 'exposing' the abuse and bringing it into the open there was real concern among the participants that both the older person and the wider family would be 'exposed' to a considerable, and possibly irreparable, 'loss of face'. The desire to avoid this was a potent reason for preferring to 'endure' their abuse. This is captured by Sue below, who knew she was being abused but still opted not to tell anyone:

*'To me, that was elder abuse... but I've never told my neighbour about it. It could be very embarrassing. People may look down upon me for having such a terrible husband; and the whole family would become a laughingstock for others, and they would get teased at, you know. It was certainly not something I was particularly proud of but I preferred to keep it with myself.'*[Sue, 71, abused by husband]

Professionals were aware that such beliefs were considerable barriers to older people reporting abuse as described previously by Ada.

The above paragraphs capture the delicate set of 'evaluations' that the theory suggests that older people make before taking a decision to 'expose' their abuse

to the authorities. Indeed as Chapter 5 illustrated, if older people told anyone about their abuse it was usually a member of their wider family or close social circle. Even when they had ‘*exposed*’ their abuse in this way their motivation was usually to have someone to talk to about their situation rather than use this as springboard to seek official help, as Pam suggests below:

*‘... My husband was very short tempered, He used to beat me when he got angry, sometimes without any particular reason at all. I endured it. I kept it all to myself. Who else could help? Call for help? No outsiders can help with family matters. Once you tell (others), you will lose opportunity to settle the conflicts within a family. I did call my brother and sister to tell them my experience... but I just wanted to ventilate, I don’t think anyone can help...’ [Pam, 78, abused by son and husband]*

The above quote highlights an over-riding perception amongst many older people that abuse is essentially a ‘*family*’ matter and, as such, should be resolved within the family. Such was the desire to ‘*keep it in the family*’ that even when instances of abuse came to the attention of the authorities older people would often refuse to act:

*‘I remember an older woman came to our Day Centre one day. She handed me some bill /statements issued by a nearby hospital. She said those were for her grandson who her daughter had left her to take care. He had been quite ill with a brain infection and needed to stay in hospital for two weeks. Now she had no money to settle to bill. With some investigation, we found that her daughter had been taking money from her bank account without her knowledge. It was a clear case of elder abuse. But when we suggested that we*

*report this to the official system, she refused the idea and said she needed only some help to settle the bill. Nothing else.’ [Gordon, a social worker with 21 years’ experience working with community-dwelling older people]*

## **7.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on the fourth of the initial foreshadowed questions that guided the study upon which this thesis is based, that is: *based on the perceptions (of elder abuse) among community-dwelling older people health and social care professionals (in Hong Kong) is it possible generate a ‘theory’ informing a better understanding of elder abuse among these groups that can be used to raise awareness and shape interventions?* The emphasis in this chapter has been on the ‘theory’, and its potential to raise awareness or to shape interventions will be considered in the concluding chapter. The aim of this chapter has been to present, as far as it was possible, an integrated theory of elder abuse that brings together the views of both groups of participants and highlights important similarities and differences.

At the heart of the theory lies the core category of ‘evaluating’ and this is essential both to understanding the explanatory power of the theory and to the way in all the other processes in the theory operate. Initial ‘evaluations’ of a potentially abusive behaviour are made by both groups using a series of, often implicit, ‘expectations’, the sources of which differ between older people and professionals. For older people traditional Chinese cultural values, especially filial piety, are the main factors underpinning their ‘expectations’.

Professionals draw more on their background and training and personal beliefs about what is ‘acceptable’ and ‘reasonable’ in a given context. For both groups

their initial '*evaluations*' are a primarily subjective process. If their initial '*expectations*' are met then a behaviour is not seen as abusive. If they are not then both groups make a further round of '*evaluations*' in order to decide if a behaviour can be '*explained/excused*'. If it can then abuse is again ruled out. If an act cannot be '*explained/excused*' then for professionals the next logical step is to '*expose*' the behaviour by bringing it into the open, albeit often within the confines of the family itself. By acknowledging abuse in this way, professionals can begin to address the underlying issue, with their first response usually being inform, educate and empower those involved.

In marked contrast, even if older people see an act as abusive they are very unlikely to '*expose*' it and the majority would prefer to '*endure*' it for fear of '*exposing*' themselves or their family to a variety of undesirable consequences.

It will be argued in the following chapters that this '*theory*' is useful both in helping better to understand the perceived nature of elder abuse amongst community-dwelling older people and professionals in Hong Kong and in identifying what might be done to raise awareness of the issue and to suggest potential interventions. The next chapter begins with a consideration of the '*quality*' of the theory presented here, including a reflexive account, before attention is turned to the contribution it makes to better understanding the phenomenon of elder abuse.

## CHAPTER 8

### REFLECTIONS ON THE 'QUALITY' OF THE STUDY AND ITS POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION TO BETTER UNDERSTANDING ELDER ABUSE

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#### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter comprises two main sections. The first reflects on the *'quality'* of the study process and its product, the substantive mid-range theory of elder abuse described in the preceding chapters. The second main section considers the potential contribution that this theory makes to advance our understanding of elder abuse, both in Hong Kong and more widely. However, if the way in which the theory was generated, or the theory itself, are of poor quality then it has no real contribution to make. Therefore, it is to issues of *'quality'* that attention is first turned.

#### 8.2 Reflections on the *'quality'* of the theory

Methodology is the *'strategy, plan of action, process or design'* underpinning the choice and use of a particular research method (Crotty, 1998, p.3). This study adopted Charmaz's (2000, 2006) constructivist ground theory approach to explore the perceptions of, and responses to, elder abuse, amongst community-dwelling older people and health and social care professionals living/working in Hong Kong. The rationale underpinning my choice of method and how it was applied were described in Chapter 4. There I also highlighted the ways in which the *'quality'* of the research process and the resultant theory would be judged.

In addition I stressed the importance of including a *'reflexive'* element within

any account of a constructivist grounded theory study. In the chapters that preceded this one I described the substantive theory of elder abuse that emerged from the study and in the chapter that follows this one, I will consider the implications of the study.

Prior to this however, it is important that I can demonstrate that the study was conducted in a robust manner and that the resultant theory meets the canons that I outlined in Chapter 4. If I cannot do this, then serious questions about the value of the study would be raised. This section therefore seeks to demonstrate that, as far as is possible within the constraints of resources and time imposed on a PhD study, the research underpinning the thesis and its product can be considered to be of a sufficient '*quality*' to have confidence in any additions to knowledge and recommendations I make based on my 'theory'.

As I suggested in Chapter 4 the question of how to judge '*quality*' in a qualitative study is a vexed one, with there being no consensus as to the best approach to adopt. For the reasons discussed in Chapter 4, I chose to adopt the modified '*authenticity*' criteria (Nolan et al. 2003) to judge the '*quality*' of the research process and Charmaz's (2006) framework to judge the '*quality*' of my theory. The extent to which the study can be said to have met these will be considered shortly, but first I turn attention to reflexivity.

### ***Reflexivity and constructivist grounded theory***

Because I was the sole investigator in this study and as the '*human instrument*' is of central importance to the '*quality*' of a constructivist grounded theory study (Charmaz 2006) I consider reflexivity to be an essential component of my thesis. As outlined in Chapter 4, the relevance of reflexivity to grounded theory has



only been considered recently. In reviewing the limited literature on the issue I chose to adopt a framework based primarily on the work of Gentiles et al. (2014) and Ramalho et al. (2015).

Following their review on the role of reflexivity in grounded theory Gentiles et al (2014) defined reflexivity as a '*generalised picture in which researchers strive to make their influence on the research explicit*' (p.1). In combining their conclusions with the work of Ramalho et al. (2105), I outlined a series of questions that a reflexive account of a grounded theory study might seek to address (see Chapter 4). Using this framework a reflexive account should consider the followings.

- Any influence that the researcher may have had on the research design and decisions about which questions to ask. This should include a consideration of the part played by any pre-existing knowledge / concepts that might have influenced the study, including the role played by the literature (Ramalho et al. 2015). These issues were addressed in Chapters 1 and 3.
- The nature of the researcher's interactions with the participants to include issues such as: how contact was made with the participants and how any initial meetings were organized; the extent to which participants were involved as '*partners*' in the study. Most of these issues were considered in Chapter 4, but more attention will be given to the involvement of participants when the '*authenticity*' criteria are addressed below.
- The influence the researcher may have had on how data were collected and analysed. For Gentiles et al. (2014) and Ramalho et al. (2015) the

processes that underpin grounded theory analysis, particularly constant comparison and memo writing, ensure an element of reflexivity on the part of the researcher. How these processes were applied in the present study was described in Chapter 4.

- Any influence the researcher may have had on the writing and reporting of the study and any impact that conducting the study had on the researcher. I will consider these issues further below.
- In addition to the above, Ramalho et al. (2015) make the interesting point that any study undertaken by a doctoral student also needs to reflect on the part played by their supervisors. For these authors, the supervisory relationship provides the '*primary terrain of reflexivity*' within a doctoral study. This is something that I will reflect on in the following paragraphs.

In order to try and ensure that reflexivity played a central role in my study, I kept a reflexive diary in which I recorded my thoughts and feelings on the above issues as the study progressed. Whilst, as illustrated earlier, some of the points above have already been considered in earlier chapters, I have yet to reflect on my role in writing and reporting on the research in this thesis, the impact that undertaking the study had on me and my relationship with my supervisors. It is to these areas that attention is now turned.

For Charmaz (2006) the way in which a study is written and reported is a key consideration, especially if the study purports to adopt a constructivist approach.

Central to Charmaz's (2006) vision of constructivism is the active involvement of participants at all stages, including, where possible, the writing and reporting of the study. Whilst this is an ideal to be aspired to there are several practical

difficulties.

For example, there are likely to be certain requirements/expectations of funding bodies, who usually expect to receive a *'traditional'* research report that stands up to rigorous peer review. Whilst recent moves towards producing a *'user'* friendly summary might go some way towards mitigating this, the extent to which participants are truly involved is questionable. There may also be other barriers, such as the willingness and ability of participants to take part in the writing process. The limited literacy of many of the older people who took part in my study meant that it would have been unrealistic to expect them to play a major role in the writing process. Furthermore, the product of my study, a PhD thesis, imposed other restrictions, including the need for it to be seen primarily as my own work and to be presented in a format proscribed by the awarding institution.

Charmaz (2006) recognizes such limitations but argues at the very least that any *'report'* of a constructivist study should, as far as is possible, be written in a language that the participants can understand. As will be argued later this is also essential if one of the *'authenticity'* criteria (that of *'equal access'* Nolan et al. 2003) is to be met. However, there are also limitations on writing in an accessible style, especially in a PhD thesis. For example, it is difficult to write about often complex methodological debates in an easy to understand language, especially for a novice researcher who may be struggling to come to terms with such debates his/herself. This was certainly true in my case. Furthermore, it is questionable whether most participants would be interested in such arguments.

For me therefore it was of more importance to present my *'results'* in a way that

participants could relate to. This in itself was challenging given the complex nature of elder abuse. I therefore tried as far as was possible to name processes using terms that most people might be familiar with, such as *'expecting'* and *'explaining/excusing'*. Unfortunately due to time constraints I could not fully explore the extent to which my participants related to my *'theory'* and this has to be acknowledged as one of the limitations of the study (see later). Therefore, it is in part for the readers of this thesis to judge the extent to which it is presented in an accessible manner.

Over and above the thesis it is my aim to disseminate my results widely, and here accessibility will be a major consideration. In part, this process has already started. So for example, at an early stage in the study, I attended the 39<sup>th</sup> British Society of Gerontology Conference and shared my literature review findings in a paper entitled *'A review of older people's perceptions of elder abuse'*, in Plymouth, the United Kingdom.

As the study progressed I attended a number of other conferences, both regional and international, where I presented my emerging results. The most recent one was a poster presentation called *'Advancing policy and practice in elder abuse: messages from stakeholders in Hong Kong'* at the International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics World Congress, California, USA. The full list of conference papers arising from this study is presented in Appendix 14. Whilst such presentations have been to a largely academic audience they have nevertheless allowed me to discuss my ideas with a variety of different people and I have no doubt that these discussions played an implicit role in shaping my thinking. This needs to be acknowledged.

Given that constructivist studies encourage the active involvement of the researcher as a '*co-constructer*' of knowledge, it is also important to consider the impact that the process had on me. Undertaking the study whilst working full time and supporting an increasingly frail parent who, as I write this thesis, has advanced dementia, has been quite a challenging experience. It has meant me having to learn new skills of time management and to make compromises in my family life and leisure time. At the same time as I was dealing with my own emotions about my Mother's condition, I was exploring a '*difficult*' issue that required me to interact with older people and professionals and to give them my full attention. At times, this was difficult and I have had to strike a balance in a number of areas of my life.

However, the research process also gave me pleasure and provided new insights into the worlds of older people, who themselves were living in challenging times as they aged. Such insights have not only added to my understanding of the topic I was studying but also impacted in a positive way of my views of ageing and the resilience that many older people have. In many ways this has been both an enlightening and a humbling experience. I can genuinely say that it has enhanced my awareness, both of myself and of others, and for me, it has been an '*authentic*' experience (see later).

The next area that I reflect upon is my interaction with my supervisors and its impact on the study. As a '*remote location*' student who undertook her PhD in a place far removed from my supervisors (Hong Kong as opposed to Sheffield), initiating and sustaining a relationship was a challenge. I made initial contact with Prof Mike Nolan via email, outlining my interest in exploring elder abuse. I was familiar with his work on family caregiving and knew that he had

published in the area of abuse. Following an exchange of emails he suggested that Dr Bridget Penhale, an authority in the field of elder abuse, would be best placed to act as my primary supervisor, a suggestion with which I readily agreed. Following this initial contact it was a requirement of my registration that I met with my supervisors at least annually. This usually involved my travelling over to Sheffield for a week to 10 days, prior to which I would send material in advance. I would then meet with my supervisors on a number of occasions for a detailed discussion about emerging and prospective issues. In addition during my study period both my supervisors came over to Hong Kong at least once each on unrelated business and we took the opportunity to meet on these occasions also.

Whilst these meetings were undoubtedly essential, they were no substitute for regular contact, so much of the engagement I had with my supervisors took place remotely. Although we did consider the use of technology, such as Skype, the time differential between Hong Kong and Sheffield (8 hours) largely precluded this and therefore the primary means of regular exchange was via email.

Despite these challenges there can be no doubt that my supervisors played a major role in shaping the study, especially my choice of methodology and how I applied it, and my understanding of the complex issues surrounding elder abuse. Both supervisors are experienced qualitative researchers but one (Prof Nolan) has written about constructivist approaches over a number of years, whilst the other (Dr Penhale) has contributed to global thinking about elder abuse for at least two decades. The opportunity to draw on their experience and to discuss, and be challenged about, emerging methodological and theoretical

ideas was of considerable value, as was their input into the final drafting of the thesis. In this respect, just as with the older people and health and social care practitioners, my supervisors can be seen as being '*participants*' in the co-construction of this thesis.

Having considered issues to do with reflexivity, attention is now turned to the '*quality*' of the research process and the resultant theory.

### **8.3 Examining the '*quality*' of the study**

As Charmaz (2006, p.182) contends '*Criteria for evaluating research depend on who forms them and what purposes he or she invokes*'. This study adopted a constructivist approach to grounded theory and any evaluation of the '*quality*' of the study and its product therefore needs to reflect this. With regard to constructivist research (and indeed qualitative methods more widely) many authors draw on the seminal writings of Guba and Lincoln (1989) whose work laid the foundations of much recent thinking about constructivist principles.

Writing originally about evaluative studies (mainly in the field of education) these authors wanted to move research practice away from the dominant positivistic paradigm, based primarily on measurement and statistical models, towards an approach that would recognise and account for the complex nature of the social world. In order to do so, they proposed what they termed a '*fourth generation*' approach to evaluation. This requires gaining the views and opinions of all the '*stakeholders*' involved in an educational initiative (for example, students, teachers, parents and funders) and actively engaging these groups in determining if the initiative had '*worked*'.

When they were first published, these views were quite radical and the authors faced considerable opposition from the advocates of more traditional ‘*scientific*’ approaches to evaluation. Guba and Lincoln (1989) recognised this and so as not to alienate their peers entirely, they suggested a set of ‘*trustworthiness*’ criteria for evaluating a fourth generation study (*credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability*) that mirrored the prevalent positivist criteria such as validity, reliability, objectivity and generalizability. These were primarily designed to address the ‘*quality*’ of the research results. However, Guba and Lincoln (1989) also argued the need for an additional set of criteria, which they termed ‘*authenticity*’ criteria. These were based on constructivist principles about engagement and involvement and were mainly concerned with how a study had been conducted. They named these criteria: *fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity and tactical authenticity*.

**Table 8.1 Evaluating the authenticity of the current study**

Guba and Lincoln (1989)	Nolan et al. (2003)	Embodied in the process in the current study
Fairness	Equal access	<i>Planning Process Product</i>
Ontological authenticity	Enhanced awareness of the position/views of self/own group	<i>Process Product</i>
Educative authenticity	Enhanced awareness of the position/views of others	<i>Planning Process Product</i>
Catalytic authenticity	Encouraging by providing a rationale or impetus for change	<i>Planning Process Product</i>
Tactical authenticity	Enabling action by providing the means to achieve, or at least begin to achieve, change	<i>Process Product</i>

Whilst endorsing these ideas, Nolan et al. (2003) argued that they went against



the very principles upon which they were based, because they were expressed in such a complex language they effectively excluded anyone other than an academic audience from the debate. In an attempt to rectify this, Nolan et al. (2003) simplified and renamed the criteria as indicated in the table below. They also suggested that the criteria could be applied at every stage of a research study, including its *'planning'*, *'process'* and *'product'*. It was this framework that was applied to my study and the extent to which it can be considered to have met these criteria now follows.

### **8.3.1 *Equal access***

In their authenticity framework, the first criterion suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1989) was *'fairness'*. This is concerned with the extent to which everyone's views are treated equally. This was re-named *'equal access'* by Nolan et al. (2003), who also extended its application beyond the research process. Following the suggestions of Nolan et al. (2003), in the study I tried to apply this criterion at all stages of the research process.

The intended participants were community-dwelling older people and health and social care professionals working with them. Therefore, in planning the study, I made every effort to ensure that the voices of both these groups were heard and seen as equally important. To ensure widespread access to the study I contacted all the Day Centres for older people in my chosen areas of Hong Kong and I then sent written invitations to all those Centres that showed an interest in my study, hoping to recruit both older people and health and social care professionals. I sought to include anyone who was able to participate, except those older people who staff felt lacked the mental capacity to do so.

Whilst this may have excluded some people based on the views of staff, this was a compromise that I felt I needed to make as I did not want to subject the older people to any formal ‘*test*’ of their mental capacity in order to take part in my study.

I also tried to ensure ‘*equal access*’ during the data collection process. So for example it was decided that I would take printed versions of the vignettes and I ensured that these were in large print so as to be accessible to those with sight problems. In the end these were rarely used as many of the older people had limited literacy and/or preferred me to read the vignettes to them. As already explained (section 4.5) the use of vignettes in my study was a strategy primarily intended to aid communication and stimulate further discussions. Consequently, their use varied in each individual interview depending on the way that the conversation unfolded. No participant therefore viewed every vignette and which vignettes were used was not consistent across interviews. However, this inconsistent use of vignettes should not be viewed as being a form of ‘*unequal access*’ but rather as a consequence of the way in which vignettes were used in the study in order to facilitate discussion and exploration of the issues.

As the study progressed I introduced emerging ideas to later participants towards the end of each interview and encouraged them to reflect upon these and to add their thoughts. This was to try and ensure that a co-construction took place and that people had ‘*equal access*’ to, and could, if they wished, shape, the ideas that were emerging. This was a compromise position as ideally I would have liked to return to each participant to and encourage them to comment on their own interview and my ideas about it. Unfortunately limitations of time did not allow me to do this.

As was noted earlier, in writing this thesis I have tried to present the results of the study in a language that is as accessible as possible, so that there is, in principle at least, '*equal access*' to the '*product*' of the study. I have also presented the results at a variety of conferences (see earlier and also Appendix 14). I plan to disseminate the results far more widely in the future and in order to meet the criterion of '*equal access*' I intend to do target outputs to a wide range of audiences, tailoring them as appropriate.

As has already been noted I did not include family carers or the perpetrators of abuse in my study (see Chapter 4) and therefore I effectively denied '*equal access*' to these groups. This must be recognised as a limitation of my work.

### **8.3.2 *Enhanced awareness of self***

This criterion is concerned with the extent to which participants view their own thoughts on the subject of interest (Elder Abuse), in a different way as a result of having taken part in the study. In planning the study I decided to use vignettes to stimulate thought and debate and these proved very successful. Most of the older people in the study had not thought about elder abuse before I contacted them and therefore inevitably they were introduced to new ideas about the topic by taking part in the study.

Whilst the professionals were dealing with abuse in their day-to-day work, the vignettes also helped them to reflect on how they perceived elder abuse and challenged some of their thinking. As a result of taking part, I feel that it is fair to say that all the participants had a differing, and I would hope more expansive, view on elder abuse than they did at the outset.

In addition however, I hope that the '*products*' of my study can be used to '*enhance awareness*' of elder abuse for a far wider audience. As will be highlighted later there is a real need to stimulate much more debates about the subject of elder abuse in Hong Kong and there are several ways that my study might do. One obvious way is to use the '*theory*' to challenge current thinking about elder abuse at all levels (see later).

Another '*product*' of the study are the vignettes. And I hope that these can be used for a range of educational purposes (this will be elaborated fuller in later discussion). There is certainly a need, for example, to enhance older peoples' awareness that elder abuse is not just an inter-generational issue and that daughters-in-law are not the main perpetrators, as well as raising awareness that elder abuse does not primarily occur in institutional settings.

### **8.3.3 *Enhanced awareness of others***

In Guba and Lincoln's (1989) words this refers to the extent to which the study's participants' '*understanding of and appreciation for the constructions of others outside their group of stakeholders are enhanced*' (p.248). In essence, it is about participants being able or enabled to better understand the views of others as a result of taking part in the study. One approach I used to try and achieve this was sharing participants' views and perceptions of elder abuse between and among other participants. This highlighted to older people that their peers might hold differing views on elder abuse than they do.

However, I feel that it was the professionals who had their awareness of others enhanced to the greatest extent. For them taking part in the study highlighted differences between their views and those of their colleagues, for example

between nurses and social workers. It also demonstrated to them that older peoples' views were not necessarily the same as theirs. A good example of this was in relation to a social worker who had a master's degree and more than twenty years' experience of working with older people. During the interview I discussed with her the fact that some older people blamed themselves for being abused because they thought that they were being '*difficult*'. She responded as follows:

*"... they said that? Really? Wow, this is certainly unknown to me, they blame themselves for the occurrence of elder abuse?! Hmm..., I do need to think about that in my future encounter of elder abuse cases." [Tracy, a social worker with over 20 years working experience with older people]*

Enhancing awareness of elder abuse is essential if the issue is to be addressed more fully. This is especially important as the subject remains largely '*hidden*'. This will be one of the major recommendations to emerge from my study (see later in Chapter 9).

#### **8.3.4 Encourage and enable action**

There was little evidence that participants in the study changed the way that they behaved as a result of taking part, and indeed I did not really expect this to be the case. Of more importance here is the **potential** that my findings have to encourage and/or enable action to be taken in respect of elder abuse. I have already given some indication of what might be done but this will receive considerably more attention later.

Having considered the extent to which the research process can be said to have been of sufficient '*quality*', attention is now turned to the theory itself.

## 8.4 Judging the quality of the 'Theory'

As was noted in Chapter 4, there are several approaches that can be used to make judgements about the quality of grounded theory but because I adopted Charmaz's (2006) version of constructivist grounded theory, I decided that it would be most sensible to apply the criteria she suggested. These are: *credibility*, *originality*, *resonance* and *usefulness* and I now consider my study in relation to these criteria.

### 8.4.1 Credibility

For Charmaz (2006) credibility is concerned primarily with the extent to which the data are sufficiently robust to support the conclusions reached. She advocates asking questions such as:

- Has your research achieved intimate familiarity with the setting or topic, and
- Are the data sufficient to merit your claim? Consider the range, number, and depth of observations contained in the data (p.182).

I consider that my study is credible in relation to such questions. For example, prior to starting data collection, I took care to ensure that I was as familiar as I could be with current understanding of elder abuse, both in Hong Kong and more widely (see Chapters 2 and 3). Furthermore, data collection in the current study was conducted across a number of geographically dispersed locations in various districts in Hong Kong. Moreover, participants were recruited from diverse educational and professional backgrounds. As a result the study generated rich data and these were rigorously analysed using a range of techniques and my interpretations were '*checked*' with future participants as

ideas emerged.

By using constant comparison strong logical links in the data were identified and connections between categories sought so that the resultant theory was, in my view, well supported by the data. I feel that, as Charmaz (2006, p.182) suggests, the data and account I have provided allows the reader ‘*to form an independent assessment of*’ and hopefully to ‘*agree with*’ the final mid-range substantive theory developed as a result of this study. Ultimately of course this is for the reader to decide.

#### **8.4.2 Originality**

For Charmaz (2006), a study’s originality is demonstrated if the categories of which the theory comprises are ‘*fresh*’ and ‘*offer new insights*’ (p.182) into the area under study. She also argues that the results should have social and theoretical significance, with the potential to challenge and/or extend current ideas and practices.

Given that there had been so little prior work on elder abuse in Hong Kong, I consider that my study can truly be said to provide some ‘*new insights*’. As argued in Chapter 3, most previous work on elder abuse had adopted a largely ‘*Western*’ perspective and focused primarily on issues to do with the incidence of abuse. There had been very few prior studies that had explored elder abuse in a Chinese cultural context and sought the views of community-dwelling older people on this topic. Furthermore elder abuse in Hong Kong has only recently been the subject of ‘*official*’ concern and this, as with most of the research, has adopted ‘*Western*’ ideas, largely uncritically. Current media representations of elder abuse in Hong Kong focus almost exclusively on institutional settings.

As far as I am aware my study has, for the first time, generated a culturally relevant theory of elder abuse in a Chinese context and, in so doing, has highlighted the subtle processes that both older people and professionals engage in when considering abuse. There is no doubt that elder abuse is of '*social significance*' and I feel confident that my study and its resultant 'Theory' has provided fresh insights that have the potential to '*challenge, extend or refine current ideas, concepts and practices*' (Charmaz 2006, p.182). The extent to which it could do so will be addressed shortly.

#### **8.4.3 Resonance**

Resonance concerns the extent to which a study captures the '*fullness*' of the topic being studied, by revealing both '*hidden*' and taken for granted meanings and thereby providing deeper insights into the '*worlds*' of the participants Charmaz (2006, p.183). Once again I feel that my study can claim to meet these criteria. A caveat needs to be added here, because, as already noted the '*fullness*' of the topic cannot truly be said to have been explored in the absence of the views of family carers and the perpetrators of abuse. This aside however I feel that I have explored, as fully as I was able to, the topic of elder abuse with my participants and in so doing revealed a number of '*hidden*' processes based on peoples', often implicit, '*expectations*'. The extent to which the theory can be said to '*make sense*' to the participants and to offer them new insights has already been considered in the earlier section on '*enhanced awareness*'

#### **8.4.4 Usefulness**

Given that one of my main aims was for the results of my study to have the potential to improve the way that elder abuse is addressed in Hong Kong, its



usefulness is of considerable importance. When assessing usefulness Charmaz (2006) suggests that the following questions need to be considered:

- Does your analysis offer interpretations that people can use in their everyday worlds?
- Do your analytic categories suggest any generic processes?
- If so, have you examined these generic processes for tacit implications?
- Can the analysis spark further research in other substantive areas?
- How does your work contribute to knowledge? How does it contribute to making a better world? (p.183)

From my analysis, it was clear that the study identified several '*generic processes*' ('*evaluating*', '*explaining/excusing*', '*enduring*', '*exposing*') and I feel that these can be used in '*everyday*' life and that they have a number of implications for further research. In addition I believe that my results contribute to knowledge and have the potential to make '*a better world*', at least in relation to better understanding and addressing elder abuse. Exploring these issues is the primary goal of the sections that follow.

The preceding text has sought to explore the '*quality*' of both the research process and the theory that emerged as a result. My main aim in doing so was to demonstrate that any implications and recommendations that I suggest merit being taken seriously. I feel that they do.

It is of course essential not to make claims that go beyond what is a small scale study, undertaken by a novice researcher. Despite this my work was, to the best of my knowledge, the first study of its kind. The account provided in this thesis captures, simultaneously, the voices of both older people and health/social care

professionals. The constructivist study design allowed the participants and the researcher to work together, to co-construct a *theory* of elder abuse that is contextually relevant to Hong Kong. There are obvious omissions, such as the absence of the voices of family carers and those who might commit abuse, and the fact that the '*theory*' was not commented upon by all the participants. These have been acknowledged.

Nevertheless I consider that the study has several potentially useful contributions to make, both to knowledge and to how elder abuse might be addressed in Hong Kong. The remainder of the thesis will consider these aspects more fully.

### **8.5 Relating my findings to existing knowledge**

A consideration of the literature at the time the study started (see Chapter 3) indicated that there was no universally agreed definition of elder abuse but that numerous different '*types*' of abuse could be identified. Also, whilst several attempts have been made to provide a theoretical explanation for elder abuse (see Table 3.2), none of these have been extensively tested in the context of elder abuse and virtually all operate at the level of '*grand*' theory.

However, since the study commenced, there have been several major reviews of the '*state of knowledge*' in the field of elder abuse (Jackson and Hafemeister 2013, Momtaz et al. 2013, National Institute of Justice 2014, Roberto and Teaster 2017, Wangmo et al. 2014,), mainly in the US, which reached a number of very similar conclusions. Foremost amongst these were:

- To date there has been very little theory development specifically relating to elder abuse

- Most of the theories that have been used to try and explain elder abuse have been '*borrowed*' from other fields, particularly child abuse and intimate partner violence
- Virtually all of these theories operate at a '*grand*' level and none have been subject to extensive empirical testing. The reviews raised serious questions about their overall relevance to elder abuse.
- Existing work tends to be fragmented along disciplinary lines with knowledge being created in '*silos*' with there being little cross disciplinary debate and sharing of knowledge
- The paucity of work about elder abuse is attributable to three main factors: limited national attention and concern; a consequent lack of funding in the area; over-reliance on existing, poorly developed theories.

In order to take our understanding of elder abuse forward, the reviews made several recommendations, including: the need to develop theories specifically about elder abuse; a move away from the emphasis on '*grand*' theories towards those that are more '*contextually*' relevant; greater recognition that cultural values and expectations influence what behaviour is considered abusive; that whilst elder abuse is complex and multifactorial it is the relationships between people that exert probably the most important influence. As Jackson and Hafemeister (2013) conclude, an appreciation of the dynamics of relationships is '*generally central to understanding and explaining the nature of elder abuse*

*and responding to it appropriately*' (p.14); it is essential that theory and practice inform each other.

Whilst these reviews were not available at the time my study started, the above conclusions nevertheless provide a powerful, albeit retrospective, endorsement for the type of study reported in this thesis and suggest that it has the potential to advance our understanding of elder abuse. It is to the potential contribution of my study to such an understanding that attention is now turned.

### **8.6 What has my study added to knowledge?**

Although, as already noted, my study was relatively small in scale and explored elder abuse in a specific context, given the conclusions of the above reviews on the state of theoretical development in the field, I nevertheless feel that it has the potential to make an important contribution to enhancing our understanding.

Consistent with the existing literature, but taking the perspectives of community-dwelling older people and professionals rather than that of academic researchers, it demonstrated that reaching consensus as to a definition of elder abuse is problematic. Whilst the *'types'* of abuse that emerged from my study were broadly comparable to those described in the existing literature, important differences in emphasis between older people and professionals emerged.

Such differences were in large part due to the highly subjective nature of what was seen to constitute abuse, even amongst professionals. In deciding what constituted abuse, both older people and professionals employed a complex process of *'evaluating'* behaviours relative to *'expectations'*, with the source of

such expectations differing between the groups. For older people traditional Chinese cultural values, especially those relating to filial piety, were highly influential. Consequently, central to their perceptions of the most hurtful forms of abuse was the lack of *'respect'* accorded older people and the erosion on their place in the family. Such abuse, most frequently attributed to daughters-in-law, was often largely invisible (the *'hidden needle'*) and played out in the context of relationships within families.

Earlier studies with Chinese Canadian (Tam and Neysmith 2006), Korean (Lee and Eaton 2009) and Japanese samples (Tomita 1999) reached similar conclusions regarding the type of abuse that older people see as the most hurtful. This reinforces the need to explore the nature and quality of family relationships more fully if elder abuse is to be better understood, as stressed in the recent reviews from the USA. Consistent with those studies involving differing Far Eastern cultures cited above, my study also clearly indicates, just as Momtaz et al. (2013) concluded, that cultural values and expectations exert a considerable influence on the types of behaviour that are considered abusive.

#### ***8.6.1 The importance of cultural context in understanding elder abuse***

Another valuable insight to emerge from my study was the fact that whilst professionals were aware of the importance older people attached to *'respect'* they did not view a lack of respect as a form of abuse per se. Such differences in perception between older people and *'experts'* as to whether behaviours such as devaluing older people are abusive or not ('yes' by older people, 'no' by a range of *'experts'*) have been described in earlier studies (Hudson and Carlson 1998). However, my study goes further by providing an explanation for such

differences. These are largely due to the fact that, in contrast to the older people who view abuse in the context of the relational dynamics within the family, professionals view abuse largely in the context of care delivery. Therefore, the ‘*evaluations*’ professionals made were primarily based on their ‘*expectations*’ of what they considered to be ‘*reasonable*’ care and support for a family member to provide, taking into account their resources and levels of understanding. Further, most professionals did not consider the older persons’ ‘*expectations*’ with respect to filial behaviour to be ‘*reasonable*’ in the context of modern day society in Hong Kong. It is important to explore this further.

As Phillips and Cheng (2012) have pointed out there have been significant changes in peoples’ acceptance of, and adherence to, traditional Chinese values in recent times, particularly between the generations. Consistent with other studies (Keating and Scharf 2012, Ogg and Renaut 2012, Phillips and Cheng 2012) the older people in my study still believed that traditional value systems, especially filial piety (*Xiao*), provide a blueprint for family life.

In essence, a set of ethical principles are endorsed in filial piety which serves as guidelines for each family member’s duties and obligations towards the family. The importance of these principles is captured in the Chinese proverb: ‘*Among hundreds of virtues, filial piety is the most important one*’ [百善孝為先]. Filial piety has long been the single most important source of the principles underpinning socialization in Chinese culture (Ho 1994) and frames the appropriate expectations of family relationships. The Chinese character of “*Xiao*” [孝] or filial piety is a combined ideogram (Dong et al. 2010) which depicts a son carrying his parents on his back. However, for Confucius filial

piety was not simply about children meeting their older parents' basic needs, such as for food and shelter, but also requires that they treat them with dignity, respect and obedience. The older people in my study still held strongly to such beliefs and from their perspective it is easy to understand the hurt that the '*hidden needle*' caused.

Whilst it was very clear that the older people in my study still firmly adhered to the values associated with filial piety, Hong Kong has experienced rapid social and political changes in recent decades. These have been accompanied by a generalized decline in close family relationship and the erosion of previously accepted patterns of reciprocal family responsibilities (Chang and Dong 2014, Cheung and Chan 2006, Chow and Lum 2008, Lum et al. 2015). These changes have happened so quickly that there has been little time for families to adjust to them and to respond to the challenges they pose to traditional cultural value and expectations.

Some authors see the growing mismatch in expectations between the generations as being a potential explanation for increases in cases of elder abuse (Cheng and Chan 2006, Lum et al. 2015, Phillips et al. 2008, Stuifbergen and Delden 2011, Yan and Tang 2004). Clearly, the assertion that perceptions of abusive behaviour can only be fully understood within their cultural context (Momtaz et al. 2013) has been endorsed by the findings of my study.

The central role played by '*expectations*' in shaping perceptions of elder abuse is therefore of vital importance and the need to account for such '*expectations*' when designing responses to elder abuse will figure prominently in the implications of the study for policy, practice and education that will be

presented later.

Returning to my theory, even if, following the process of '*evaluating*', a behaviour was deemed potentially abusive this did not necessarily mean that it would be '*exposed*'. Rather both older people and professionals sought to '*explain/excuse*' a behaviour before they would consider taking any further action. If an '*explanation*' could be found and the behaviour '*excused*' then abuse was not seen to have occurred. If a behaviour could not be '*explained/excused*' then professionals often felt that they needed to '*expose*' the abuse and take action, usually, unless the abuse was severe, in the form of information, advice and support. What form this information and advice might best take will also be considered in the implications section. Conversely older people often chose to '*endure*' rather than '*expose*' the abuse.

#### ***8.6.2 Influence of 'family harmony' and 'saving face' on responses to elder abuse***

For older people therefore the decision to '*expose*' the abuse was a fraught one and was not a decision to be taken lightly. The reasons for this have already been considered in some detail and will not be rehearsed again here. However, once again traditional Chinese values, this time those of maintaining '*family harmony*' and avoiding '*loss of face*', played a central role. The older peoples' decision to '*endure*' their abuse presents a formidable barrier to them reporting ('*exposing*') it to others. This reluctance was reinforced by their belief that abuse is a '*family*' matter. Such beliefs have been noted as barriers to older people reporting abuse in other studies of far eastern cultures (Lee and Eaton 2009, Walsh et al. 2010) but none of these studies has framed this reluctance in the context of a coherent theory.



It is to the potential contribution of my *'theory'* to advancing thinking about the important of understanding the *'context'* of abuse that attention is now turned.

### ***8.6.3 Developing a 'contextual theory' approach to elder abuse***

*'Without an awareness of context, the understanding of elder abuse will remain incomplete'* (Roberto and Teaster 2017, p. 35)

It was my desire to understand elder abuse in an appropriate cultural *'context'* that was one of the primary motivating forces behind me undertaking the study reported in this thesis. As the quote above would suggest the importance of accounting for context, and the part it plays in shaping what counts as abuse, has recently been increasingly recognised.

Building on the conclusions of the reviews cited earlier calling for the development of a theory specific to elder abuse that moves away from *'grand'* theory, Roberto and Teaster (2017) argued for the need to develop what they termed a *'contextual theory'* of elder abuse. They proposed that such a theory should recognise the complex nature of abuse and that in order to do so it needs to consider the influence of four separate, but related, *'contexts'*, they termed these the:

- *'Individual'* context that is concerned with the personal characteristics of older people and their abuser(s) including situational influences and past events/history
- *'Relational'* context which addresses the interactions and personal ties that bind older people and their abuser(s) together

- ‘*Community*’ context that considers the influence that the local community may have on responses to, and understandings of, abuse
- ‘*Societal*’ context that is shaped by the mores, values and policies that in large part determine the wider understanding of and, responses to, elder abuse.

To the best of my knowledge, the theory presented in this thesis is the first that has presented what might be called a ‘*contextual theory*’ of elder abuse, with each of the above elements figuring in my theory. The individual ‘*context*’ relates to the ‘*expectations*’ that older people and professionals draw on when ‘*evaluating*’ whether a behaviour is seen as abusive or not. To this should be added the perspective of the actual/potential abuser. The absence of such a perspective has already been acknowledged as a limitation of my work.

For older people it was the ‘*relational context*’ that was particularly influential in shaping their perceptions of abuse and it was the extent to which their ‘*expectations*’ regarding their place and role in the family were met or not that was the deciding factor. Whilst professionals recognised the influence of relational dynamics, these were less central to their ‘*evaluations*’ of potentially abusive behaviour. Instead their focus was more on the context of care delivery and whether the care an older person received could be considered as ‘*reasonable*’ in the light of their circumstances including the families’ resources, knowledge/understanding about the care required and the abilities of the care provider. Building on this finding, I would suggest that the absence of a ‘*caregiving context*’ is a potentially important omission from the framework proposed by Roberto and Teaster (2017) and one that should be added.

This is important as there are likely to be differences in how abuse manifests itself in various caregiving contexts, for example between abuse occurring in community settings (my focus here) and that taking place in residential environments.

The influence of the '*community context*' was also apparent for both older people and professionals in my study, albeit operating in different ways. For older people it was the anticipated reaction of their local community to their abuse being made public (and the consequent '*loss of face*') that was a significant impediment to them '*exposing*' abuse. For professionals, it was the often implicit standards of care operating within their disciplinary '*community*' that played a major role in shaping their expectations of what might be deemed '*reasonable*' and '*acceptable*' .

Although I did not explicitly set out to collect data on the '*societal context*' of abuse, its influence was nevertheless apparent. This emerged from my initial consideration of the ways in which abuse is portrayed in the media in Hong Kong and the lack of attention given to abuse in community settings, and how abuse is defined, and therefore recorded, in the '*official*' records. My study revealed significant differences in older peoples' perceptions of who was likely to be the main abuser (daughters-in-law but rarely spouses) and the official records over the last several years as captured in the table below. Consequently, for the older people in my study, abuse was primarily an intergenerational issue but the figures below (see Table 8.2) indicate that the '*official*' statistics record spouses as by far the most frequent perpetrator.

Furthermore, from the accounts of both older people and professionals, it was also clear that changes to wider societal acceptance of long held values and

social mores, especially filial piety, were of great importance in understanding older peoples' perceptions of abuse.

**Table 8.2 Official statistics revealing abusers' relationship with the victim 2010-2015**

	<u>2016</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2010</u>
<u>Relationship with Victim</u>	<u>No. of Abusers</u>	<u>No. of Abusers</u>	<u>No. of Abusers</u>	<u>No. of Abusers</u>	<u>No. of Abusers</u>	<u>No. of Abusers</u>	<u>No. of Abusers</u>
<b>Son</b>	73 (11.9%)	56 (10.1%)	60 (10.5%)	64 (10.9%)	45 (11.0%)	24 (8.8%)	27 (8.5%)
<b>Daughter</b>	19 (3.1%)	22 (3.9%)	20 (3.5%)	19 (3.2%)	9 (2.2%)	4 (1.5%)	6 (1.9%)
<b>Son-in-law</b>	8 (1.3%)	5 (0.9%)	3 (0.5%)	2 (0.3%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (1.1%)	2 (0.6%)
<b>Daughter-in-law</b>	16 (2.6%)	19 (3.4%)	18 (3.2)	17 (2.9%)	14 (3.4%)	7 (2.6%)	4 (1.3%)
<b>Spouse</b>	292 (47.6%)	297 (53.3%)	323 (56.8%)	376 (63.8%)	231 (56.6%)	186 (68.1%)	250 (78.4%)
<b>Grandchildren</b>	5 (0.8%)	7 (1.3%)	6 (1.1%)	8 (1.4%)	7 (1.7%)	2 (0.7%)	1 (0.3%)
<b>Relative</b>	25 (4.1%)	11 (2.0%)	17 (3.0%)	15 (2.5%)	10 (2.5%)	3 (1.1%)	3 (0.9%)
<b>Friend / Neighbour</b>	76 (12.4%)	50 (9.0%)	33 (5.8%)	11 (1.9%)	15 (3.7%)	6 (2.2%)	2 (0.6%)

Source: Social Welfare Department, Hong Kong (2017)

Therefore, whilst there is clear resonance between the dimensions of the 'contextual theory' of elder abuse proposed by Roberto and Teaster (2017), I have already suggested that there is a need to add a further 'context' that relates to caregiving. However, given my starting point, another potentially important omission from the framework outlined by Roberto and Teaster (2017) is that of a 'cultural context'. Whilst the population of Hong Kong, as described in Chapter 2, is 92% Chinese, other countries have an increasingly diverse cultural mix and therefore the inclusion of a 'cultural context' to future studies exploring elder abuse would appear essential.

The purpose of this study was to develop a 'substantive' mid-range theory that

would help to further understand elder abuse in a specific setting, Hong Kong and I believe that it has done so. However, one of the strengths of grounded theory work is that the insights it generates should be '*modifiable*' (Glaser 1978) and capable of extension to other settings and populations. In this way, theories can develop to become '*formal*' mid-range theories that seek to enhance understanding of the same phenomenon but in a wider array of contexts. In order for this to occur, I would suggest that future studies of elder abuse adopt a '*contextual theory*' approach, as argued by Roberto and Teaster (2017), but that they consider six, and opposed to four contexts, these being:

- The Individual Context
- The Relational Context
- **The Caregiving Context**
- The Community Context
- **The Cultural Context**
- The Societal Context

(Text in **bold** indicating additions suggested by my work)

## 8.7 Conclusion

This chapter has considered the 'quality' of the study and the resultant 'theory', as well as its potential contribution to knowledge. The concluding chapter will discuss the implications of this work for policy, practice, education and future research.

## CHAPTER 9

### ***‘REFRAMING EXPECTATIONS’*: USING A CONTEXTUAL THEORY TO DEVELOP NEW APPROACHES TO ADDRESSING ELDER ABUSE**

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#### **9.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the main findings of the study are summarized with reference to its initial aims and subsequently the implications of these findings are considered in terms of their potential contributions to research, policy and practice.

As was outlined at the end of Chapter 3, the initial aims of the study were to explore:

- The perceptions of what constitutes elder abuse among a sample of Chinese community-dwelling participants aged 65 or over
- The beliefs about help-seeking behaviours among a sample of community-dwelling participants aged 65 or over faced with potentially abusive situations
- The perceptions of what constitutes elder abuse and what current interventions are employed among a sample of professionals (social workers and/or community nurses), and based upon the above to
- To see if it was possible generate a ‘theory’ informing a better understanding of elder abuse among community-dwelling Chinese older people and professionals in Hong Kong that could be used to raise awareness and shape interventions.

As the preceding chapters have indicated the perceptions of what constitutes

elder abuse amongst both community dwelling older people and health and social care professionals were shaped by an array of factors (with Chinese cultural beliefs playing a prominent role ). Participants' responses to abusive, or potentially abusive, situations involved a complex series of '*evaluations*' made against the backdrop of certain sets of '*expectations*' which varied between older people and health and social care professionals. These briefly unfolded as follows:

- The first '*evaluation*' involved a decision about whether a certain behavior was seen as abusive or not. In determining their response to this both older people and professionals drew upon a set of, often implicit, '*expectations*'. Older peoples' '*expectations*' were informed primarily by traditional Chinese beliefs about filial piety and the respect that they felt that older family members should be accorded within the family. In contrast professionals drew on their training and experience in determining if a behavior was '*reasonable*' and '*acceptable*' in a given context.
- If a behavior was seen as potentially abusive then the next process was to see if it could be '*explained and excused*'. If a reasonable '*explanation*' could be found (for example illness or stress) then the behavior could be '*excused*' and was not seen as abusive.
- If after both of the above processes the behavior was still seen as (potentially) abusive then decisions had to be made about whether to '*endure*' the behavior and put up with it, or to '*expose*' the behavior and make it public. For professionals, the decision was often relatively clear cut but many older people would choose to '*endure*' rather than '*expose*' abuse, as the latter would often result in either: a '*loss of*

*face*’; a threat to *family harmony*’; or potentially negative consequences for the abuser.

Based on the above a *‘contextual’* theory of elder abuse was developed that was fully explored in the earlier chapters. I believe that this theory has a number of implications for research, policy and practice that are considered below.

In the preceding chapter attention was turned to the mid-range theory that was of the main product of the study. In it I discussed both the *‘quality’* of the research process and the emergent theory, together with what the study might add to our understanding of participants’ perceptions of, and responses to, elder abuse in Hong Kong. In addition, I considered the findings in relation to existing literature, especially recent reviews of the state of knowledge in the field of elder abuse. Building on the work of Roberto and Teaster (2017), I outlined a *‘contextual theory’* of elder abuse that I believe has the potential to extend the reach of the substantive theory deriving from my own study to other contexts and populations. This of course remains to be explored.

This chapter considers the implications of both my theory and the wider *‘contextual’* framework for developing new approaches to understanding and addressing elder abuse. I will argue that action needs to be considered across all six *‘contexts’* (individual; relational; care; community; cultural and societal) if improvements to the way in which elder abuse is perceived and addressed are to be made.

Furthermore, I will contend that, whilst there is an obvious need for structural changes (for example, more resources to address elder abuse), the most significant changes need to be made at a perceptual level. This is because my



study revealed that how elder abuse is perceived is a largely subjective and involves, an often implicit, process of ‘*evaluating*’ behaviours in the light of certain ‘*expectations*’.

One of the potential strengths of the theory presented here is that it has begun to make these ‘*evaluations*’ and ‘*expectations*’ more explicit than they previously have been. Here I will suggest that these insights can form the basis for a more informed and open discussion about elder abuse, the aim of which should be to ‘*reframe expectations*’ at each of the six previously described contextual levels. It is to this area that attention is now turned.

## **9.2 Bringing the ‘*hidden*’ out into the open**

As the recent reviews into the state of knowledge in the field of elder abuse, discussed in the previous chapter, made clear although elder abuse has undoubtedly existed for centuries, it is only in the last 30-40 years that it has received any considered attention. Even now, when compared to other areas such as child abuse, the topic is under-researched and under-theorised.

Consequently, it remains largely ‘*hidden*’ and is rarely the subject of full public discussion. My initial consideration of how elder abuse is represented in the media in Hong Kong (see Chapter 2) certainly reaffirmed this.

Following their review of research in the field of elder abuse Jackson and Hafmeister (2013) concluded that there are three main reasons why the topic remains the ‘*poor relation*’, these are:

- Compared to areas such as child abuse it is accorded little national attention and is not seen as an area of great public concern nor a policy

priority

- Consequently limited resources/funding have been made available for either research or to develop initiatives to address elder abuse
- Understanding of the phenomenon has been limited by an over-reliance on theories '*borrowed*' from other disciplines that are of questionable relevance to elder abuse.

These authors, together with others (Momtaz et al. 2014, National Institute for Justice 2014, Teaster 2014), have called for research that develops a theory that specifically addresses the subject, leading Roberto and Teaster (2017) to propose their '*contextualised*' theory of elder abuse. Although all these authors are from the USA their conclusions capture the most recent thinking about the state of knowledge relating to elder abuse more widely. However, the target audience for these various reviews were primarily other researchers and, to a lesser extent, policy makers and practitioners in the field. Little attention was given to the need for a wider public consideration of elder abuse.

As a result of my study I have proposed a more inclusive '*contextual*' theory that I believe has the potential to extend debate and thinking in the area. Below I consider how such a debate might be encouraged, together with the implications of my study for developing new approaches to elder abuse in Hong Kong, and possibly further afield.

As Hamby (in the National Institute of Justice Debate on Elder Abuse 2014) contends, if progress in the field is to be made, then attention needs to be turned to things that can be changed. She argues that these fall into two broad categories that she termed '*external resources*' and '*internal assets*'. Whilst I would agree

that there is a need for more external resources to be devoted to tackling elder abuse, my main focus here will be on the need to address '*internal assets*'.

According to Hamby (2014), '*internal assets*' are those '*meaning making*' behaviours that a person (and, I will argue below, communities and societies) engage in which largely shape '*who they are*' and how they make sense of their world. This study has started to illuminate the types of '*meaning making*' behaviours engaged in by both older people and professionals when trying to make sense of elder abuse. These revolve largely around the '*expectations*' that they hold about what constitutes potential abuse. Consequently when addressing abuse, it is essential to consider how we might begin '*reframing*' these '*expectations*'. This, I believe, needs to be the main focus of interventions designed to bring elder abuse '*out of the shadows*'.

### **9.3 '*Reframing expectations*': Applying a '*contextual*' theory of elder abuse**

The theory resulting from my study is a '*substantive*', mid-range one, focusing on elder abuse in a specific context. However, grounded theorists (Charmaz 2006, Glaser 1978) argue that efforts to '*modify*' such substantive theories, so that they become a '*formal*' theory should be actively encouraged. Such a consideration could apply to the '*contextual*' theory presented in the previous chapter. Taking an even broader view, elder abuse can be considered as one type of social response to a particular phenomenon that can be potentially better understood with reference to the wider literature regarding how people '*make sense*' of their social world more generally. This is implicit in Hamby's (2014) notion of '*internal assets*' and the role that they play in '*meaning making*'.

For many years, social psychologists have argued that the ways in which people

interpret their perceived realities are key to understanding how they behave and that such interpretations are largely a product of their interactions with their environment and others within it (Carlston and Smith 1996). Indeed, this belief underpins the constructivist thinking that guided this study. It has been argued (Goffman 1974) that when interpreting and making sense of their world, people *'frame'* their everyday experiences by drawing on their past experiences/beliefs (what Hamby (2014) would call *'internal assets'*) and applying these to the context in which they currently find themselves.

Variations in an individual's background and experiences, cultural beliefs and values (*'internal assets'*) will provide a differing *'frame'* which they use to help decide upon a particular course of action in a given context. This rationale is entirely consistent with the process of *'evaluating'* that lies at the heart of my theory, in which peoples' *'expectations'* provide the *'frame'* that participants use to interpret a situation (in this case, a potentially abusive behaviour) and decide their subsequent response to it (either to *'explain/excuse'*, *'endure'* or *'expose'*). The differing *'frames'* that older people and professionals draw upon help to explain variations both in what they see as abuse and how they respond to it.

For older people, such *'frames'* arise largely from their past lives and rely heavily on their prior experiences and the cultural values with which they were brought up. Accordingly, they *'expect'* their younger family members to use a similar *'frame'* to determine how an older person should be treated within the family. My study would indicate that this is often not the case and that differing interpretations of what it is *'reasonable'* to *'expect'* within a modern day family

*'frame'* the type of *'hidden needle'* abuse and lack of *'respect'* that older people see as the most hurtful.

Importantly, whilst professionals seem to be aware of the hurt that a lack of *'respect'* causes older people, because they use a differing *'frame'* to interpret abuse they do not necessarily view disrespectful behaviour as a form of abuse per se. This suggests that abuse is viewed principally from *'the eye of the beholder'*. Therefore one potential way of addressing abuse might be to consider how peoples' differing *'expectations'* can be *'reframed'*. To achieve this I believe that there is a need to consider a range of *'expectations'* operating at all six *'contextual'* levels.

However, in the first instance my focus will be on the *'internal assets'* that Hamby (2014) argues shape *'meaning making'*, and which she sees operating largely at the interpersonal level, that is: the *'individual context'* (older person, family member(s) and professionals); and the *'relational context'* (concerning the interactions between older people and family members, older people and professionals and professionals and family members), and to a lesser extent the *'community context'*.

This suggests that one potentially profitable avenue to explore is how professionals might develop differing types of intervention, in addition to the information, advice and resources that they currently target largely at the actual/potential perpetrators of abuse. Foremost amongst these developments I would suggest should be efforts that assist both older people and family members to *'reframe'* their *'expectations'* of what they consider is *'reasonable'* behaviour within a multi-generational household.

Of course, it would be unrealistic to believe that older people can (or indeed should) relinquish the beliefs that they have used as guiding principles throughout their lives. Nevertheless, professionals might help them to recognise that such beliefs are not necessarily consistent with those held by younger family members. Encouraging more open discussion and dialogue of everyone's '*expectations*' could prove very useful in recognising and addressing actual or potential tensions within the '*relational context*' that might be a precursor of abuse. This would introduce a preventative element to interventions that is currently largely absent.

Therefore, whilst it would be wrong to undermine the beliefs that older people hold they might be encouraged to discuss and agree, together with younger family members, a set of '*expectations*' that are mutually acceptable. This is important as some professionals in my study believed that older peoples' '*expectations*' of filial behaviour were '*unreasonable*' in modern day Hong Kong, something that was reiterated by some of the older participants themselves. Whilst it would be quite inappropriate to suggest a '*blame the victim*' approach, the best relationships always require some form of compromise. Indeed there has been recognition in the recent literature on elder abuse that not all older abused people are '*pure victims*' and that future interventions should focus on the dynamics of the relationship between the older victim and the perpetrator, rather than on each person in isolation, as is often the case now (Jackson and Hafemeister 2013).

Such developments might encourage greater debate about whether a lack of filial piety is actually a form of abuse and this could include a consideration of

the '*expectations*' that older people have of their daughter-in-law(s). This is clearly required if current perceptions of the daughter-in-law as being the main perpetrator of abuse are to be addressed. Another avenue that needs to be explored is the belief that abuse is primarily an intergenerational issue.

In addition it would also be important for professionals to explore with older people their concerns about the possible consequences of them '*exposing*' abuse and the potential '*loss of face*' that they believe would follow. All these interventions would require quite a different role for professionals and this has implications for both their practice and training. These will be considered in greater detail below.

Hamby's (2014) conceptualisation of '*internal assets*' relates primarily to the intrapersonal processes and interpersonal dynamics operating in the '*individual*' and '*relational*' contexts. However, I feel that similar considerations should be applied to the '*community*' context, as described below.

My study suggested that professional '*expectations*' of elder abuse are the product not only of their individual beliefs and experiences, but also of their professional background and training, arising from what might be called their disciplinary '*community*'. So, for example, subtle differences in the '*evaluations*' of potential abuse were apparent between nurses and social workers. The former tended to focus primarily on the '*caregiving*' context, applying what they perceived to be '*reasonable*' standards when making their '*evaluations*' of '*acceptable*' care; the latter were more inclined to consider the nature and quality of family interactions, suggesting a greater inclination towards the '*relational*' context. Both groups however, still drew primarily on a largely implicit set of

*'expectations'*. This might in large part explain why, despite the existence of an *'official'* definition of elder abuse, reaching agreement as to what abuse means in practice proved elusive.

The existence of such disciplinary *'communities'*, underpinned by largely implicit *'expectations'* is as an example of the *'silo'* thinking that some argue has limited innovation in the field of elder abuse (National Institute of Justice 2014, Roberto and Teaster 2017). Whilst the *'silos'* referred to by these authors were operating within academic disciplines, the same *'silos'* might be said to operate within professional disciplines. Therefore, if advances are to be made there is a need to *'reframe'* professional *'expectations'* regarding elder abuse and to make more explicit the *'internal assets'* that a disciplinary *'community'* draws upon when *'meaning making'*. This will require far greater dialogue within and between such *'communities'* if a consensus as to what constitutes abuse is to be reached.

So far, I have focused attention mainly on one element of Hamby's (2014) framework, *'internal assets'*. Before going on to consider the need for greater *'external resources'* I would like to suggest the potential value of adding another component to Hamby's (2014) model, which, after Hamby (2014) I have termed *'external assets'*.

For Hamby (2014) *'internal assets'* are those values, beliefs and experiences that largely define who an individual *'is'* and which they draw upon when *'meaning making'* in the world. Given the lack of public debate about elder abuse and the difficulties that even researchers have in reaching an agreed definition, I believe that we also need to recognise the role played by *'external assets'*. These, I would



suggest, are the values and beliefs that larger collectivities draw upon when ‘*meaning making*’. In relation to my theory I would see these operating in the ‘*cultural*’ and ‘*societal*’ contexts. I will consider these contexts below.

As the introductory chapter of this thesis made clear, exploration of elder abuse is a fairly recent phenomenon worldwide and even more so in Hong Kong. In recent years there has been some ‘*official*’ recognition that elder abuse exists in Hong Kong and semi-annual statistics have been collected. However, as argued in Chapter 2, these probably grossly under-represent the actual prevalence of abuse as they only capture recorded incidences.

Moreover, thinking as to what constitutes abuse in Hong Kong has relied almost exclusively on concepts and ideas ‘*borrowed*’ from the Western world. This is apparent in the ‘*official*’ definition which sees abuse as being ‘...*the commission or omission of any act that endangers the welfare and safety of an elder*’ (Social Welfare Department 2003). On this basis it seems that the sort of ‘*assets*’ used to ‘*frame*’ the ‘*meaning*’ of abuse in Hong Kong to date have indeed been ‘*external*’ and official policy, such as there is, flows from these.

Despite this recent, albeit limited, ‘*official*’ recognition of abuse, public awareness, and understanding of the topic remains largely absent. Public perceptions, such as they are, are ‘*framed*’ almost exclusively by the ‘*external assets*’ provided by the mass media. These are, as was again as demonstrated in Chapter 2, highly sensationalised and ‘*frame*’ abuse almost exclusively within the ‘*institutional care*’ context.

I would therefore argue that in a ‘*societal*’ context understanding of elder abuse

in Hong Kong is currently very limited and is *'framed'* by an extremely narrow and culturally inappropriate set of *'expectations'*. In order to *'reframe'* these *'expectations'* there is an urgent need for a far more open and explicit debate about elder abuse on a number of fronts, including:

- Recognition that abuse occurs in families and not just in institutions and that it is a *'societal'* and not just a *'family'* issue
- A detailed consideration of the role that traditional Chinese culture, especially filial piety, plays in how abuse is perceived and defined. Whilst acknowledging the critical role that such beliefs have always played in determining what it means to be *'Chinese'* such debates might also reflect upon the continued relevance of such beliefs in an increasingly rapidly changing world, and how to reach greater inter-generational agreement as to the future role of such beliefs.
- The type and level of resources that should be allocated both to older people themselves and to developing strategies to combat elder abuse. The former point is important as many of the participants in the study suggested that the ways in which older people are currently treated in Hong Kong, such as limited financial support and a lack of dedicated community resources, may not only foster abuse but be also be a form of abuse.

Having considered the importance of *'reframing expectations'* in multiple contexts, attention is now turned to the implications of this for policy, practice, education and future research.

#### 9.4 How can my theory be made to ‘work’?

For Glaser and Strauss (1969) one of the defining characteristics of a grounded theory is that it should be able to ‘work’. For these authors this meant that the mid-range substantive theory that was the product of a study should have ‘function’ and ‘application’ beyond the study itself. In other words, people should be able to use it in a practical way to address the subject of interest, in my case elder abuse. It was this characteristic that was one of the reasons why I was attracted to grounded theory in the first place. In this concluding section of the thesis I will consider some of the ways in which my theory **might** be applied to address the issue of elder abuse in Hong Kong.

Given the mainly subjective way that my participants ‘defined’ elder abuse and the often implicit processes that they engaged in when responding to it, I will focus primarily on the need to ‘reframe expectations’.

This ‘reframing’ is essential given the differences in perception that emerged between and amongst my participants as to what was seen to constitute abuse and who was likely to be the main perpetrator(s). Unless greater consensus can be achieved on these pivotal points then devising more sensitive ways of addressing elder abuse will prove very difficult. Consistent with the ‘contextual’ theory that emerged from my study I will argue that such ‘reframing’ needs to occur across the various contexts that comprise my theory (individual; relational; community; caregiving; cultural; and societal) in order to raise awareness and foster greater debate about the type of ‘internal assets’ (Hamby 2014) and ‘external assets’ (my addition) that people and groups draw when ‘making sense’ of their world.

In presenting my thoughts I will begin with the '*societal*' and '*cultural*' contexts.

#### ***9.4.1 Widening the debate on elder abuse***

As has been noted at a number of points in this thesis despite growing awareness of the issue, elder abuse remains a largely '*hidden*' phenomenon, and is rarely the subject of widespread public debate. This is certainly the case in Hong Kong. This needs to change if understanding of elder abuse is to increase, the resources that are required to address it are to be made available and new approaches to dealing with elder abuse are to emerge.

However, as my study has indicated, how elder abuse is currently perceived by those it affects (or potentially affects) cannot be understood without reference to longstanding traditional Chinese cultural beliefs, especially those relating to filial piety. Any consideration of abuse therefore also has to include debates about the role that such values and beliefs should play in modern day society in Hong Kong.

With respect to elder abuse a good place to start the debate would be with the '*official*' definition used in Hong Kong. The literature review (Chapter 3) highlighted that consensus as to a definition of elder abuse has proved elusive and amongst my participants it was clear that the ways in which they viewed abuse, including the professionals, was not necessarily in accord with the definition used by the Department of Social Welfare. This organisation defines abuse as follows: '*Elder abuse refers to the commission or omission of any act that endangers the welfare or safety of an elder.*' (Procedural Guidelines for Handling Elder Abuse Cases 2003, p.15). This (possibly deliberately) vague and

inclusive definition raises a potentially important distinction. Therefore, whilst it might be relatively easy to agree on acts that endanger the '*safety*' of an older person, this is likely to prove more challenging with regard to their '*welfare*'.

According to the Oxford Dictionary (Online) the definition of welfare most relevant here refers to it as: '*The health, happiness and fortune of a person or group*' (www.en.oxforddictionaries.com accessed 27<sup>th</sup> February 2018). For my older participants one of the major factors determining their welfare was the '*respect*' they were accorded within their family. Consequently a lack of such respect, which often manifested itself in subtle ways (the '*Hidden Needle*'), was the most hurtful and prevalent form of elder abuse. On the other hand, my professional participants interpreted welfare mainly in the context of care delivery and made judgements based on their views about what it was '*reasonable*' to expect a family member to provide. Whilst they recognised that older people used a differing '*frame*' to decide what was abusive the professionals did not see such '*expectations*' of filial piety as necessarily being '*reasonable*' in modern day Hong Kong.

Therefore, in widening the debate about what might constitute elder abuse it is also necessary to widen debate, at the '*societal*' and '*cultural*' contexts, about the role that traditional Chinese values should continue to play. Such values are the primary source of the '*external*' assets that large groups within society (especially older people) use to '*make sense*' of many aspects of their lives. However their relevance is being increasingly questioned by younger generations. Such a debate will, of course, have impact well beyond elder abuse but '*framing*' it within the context of abuse might be a good way of '*getting the ball rolling*'.

How this debate might be initiated is not straightforward but an increasingly important source of the '*external*' assets that shape societies perceptions of the world is the media, especially social media. If this is the main platform used by the current President of the United States then it clearly has potential to extend debate on elder abuse, and the wider issue of traditional Chinese values, in Hong Kong. To guarantee '*equal access*' it would be essential to ensure that older people were able fully to participate in such debates and therefore social media alone would not be enough. However, using a variety of formats, debates about a wide range of issues related to elder abuse and the role of traditional Chinese culture could be encouraged more widely in order to make people aware of, and to challenge, a number of granted and/or '*hidden*' assumptions, such as:

- The currently prevalent view that elder abuse is confined largely to institutions, thereby bringing the '*caregiving*' context into the discussion
- The need to explore ways of making it easier for older people to '*expose*' abuse and how the '*loss of face*' that they believe will follow this can be reduced. For example, if society as a whole is more aware of elder abuse and view it as a '*societal*' issue then support for older people who '*expose*' abuse in a '*community*' context is likely to be far greater
- The need to challenge the belief that elder abuse is largely a '*family*' as opposed to a '*societal*' issue
- Discussion about how society should '*frame*' its views on the welfare of older people, especially the role that traditional Chinese values, such

as filial piety, should play. This should also include debates as to what it is '*reasonable*' to expect younger family members to provide when supporting older family members and what support they should receive from the government

- The need to raise awareness that elder abuse is not primarily an intergenerational issue and that there are a range of potential perpetrators within and outside the family
- The need to raise awareness of differing types of abuse, such as the '*older husband, young wife*' financial abuse described earlier and the existence of sexual abuse, especially that occurring between partners
- The need to consider how preventative and proactive approaches to elder abuse can be developed
- The need to stimulate discussion about the level of resources currently allocated to address elder abuse and the resources provided for older people themselves.

Such debates will become increasingly important given future demographic changes. They are likely to prove challenging and lengthy but need to be initiated.

A number of issues relevant to the '*community*' context have been raised above, so here I will focus my attention on stimulating debate amongst the professional '*communities*' whose reliance on often implicit '*internal*' assets which '*frame*' what they view as '*reasonable*' need to be challenged if '*silo*' thinking is to be avoided. This may mean re-educating community practitioners so that they are

more aware of the views of their peers from differing disciplines so that they may work together more effectively. It would also enable them to reflect upon the views of older people and better understand their perspectives.

The vignettes that I used in the present study proved useful in this respect and there may be value in adapting these as educational resources to stimulate debate, not only amongst differing professions, but also the wider public. My earlier survey on the views of student nurses (Lo et al. 2009) clearly indicated that their training ill prepared them to recognise elder abuse and therefore consideration might also be given to including the subject in the training of all professionals who are likely to encounter elder abuse.

If we turn attention to the '*individual*' and '*relational*' contexts my results highlight the need for professionals to adopt differing methods of working when they encounter elder abuse that complements the information, advice and support that they currently provide. For example, they need to consider how to initiate discussion within families about the values and beliefs that differing generations use to '*frame*' their '*expectations*' of each other so that, as far as is possible, a mutually agreeable and commonly held set of values can be negotiated. This will mean working with both the victims and the perpetrators of abuse, rather than dealing with each separately as is often the case now. They also need to help older people to overcome the reluctance they now have to '*exposing*' abuse, if all other interventions fail.

The above text has outlined a number of the ways in which my findings could be put to '*work*' in addressing elder abuse; there are no doubt others. Before concluding, it must be reemphasised that mine was a small scale study and that



there is a need for further research. One obvious omission in my study was the failure to include the views of family carers and the perpetrators of abuse. Studies that include these groups, as well as older people and professionals, are needed. Furthermore my study was confined to one geographical location. Whilst earlier studies have suggested similar findings amongst other far eastern cultures (for example Japan and Korea) work that explicitly explores the relevance of my '*contextual*' theory to other cultures would be of value.

My study adopted a constructivist grounded theory approach but there would be merit in devising studies based on an action research model that took some of my findings and sought to '*test*' them out as ways of addressing elder abuse, for example by refining and introducing the vignettes as a means of raising debate and awareness of elder abuse amongst differing groups. Thus represents just a small fraction of the future work that could be undertaken.

## **9.5 Conclusion**

*'Without an awareness of context, the understanding of elder abuse will remain incomplete'* (Roberto and Teaster 2017, p. 35)

The above quote seems to be an appropriate way to conclude this thesis. I hope that the work within it has, in a modest way, provided some new insights into the phenomenon of elder abuse in Hong Kong, and potentially further afield. If these insights raise awareness of elder abuse and stimulate others to either explore it further themselves and/or seek to devise new ways of helping those who experience abuse then the journey will have been worthwhile.

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## LIST OF APPENDICES

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## **Appendix 1: Initial Vignettes on Elder Abuse Scenarios**

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1. Mr. and Mrs. Li are now 89 and 88 years old respectively. Both are lucid and capable of making decisions for their simple daily living. They have four children; all are married and have their own home. Mr. & Mrs. Li live by themselves with a live-in Pilipino domestic helper.

Mrs. Li has type 2 diabetes and hypertension. Although she can walk with minor assistance for a short distance, she gets faint easily.

Mr. Li is physically stronger. He can walk independently though he gets tired easily and lately his gait has been getting a bit unsteady.

Their four children decided to keep their parents in doors by making the domestic helper a gatekeeper at all times!
2. Mr. Chiang, ages 82, lives with his only son, Ming, aged 49 and single, in a public estate flat which is barely 80 feet. Their beds are located next to each other. Chiang has chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and two weeks ago, he started to experience mild respiratory distress. In addition, he has been coughing periodically at nights. Ming is a taxi driver and needs to work from 0700 till 1900 on a daily basis. Ming's sleep has lately been disturbed by his father's cough. One night, Ming just could not take it anymore, and thus after he had been woken up by his coughing once more in the middle of the night, he shook her father vigorously.

Is there any difference if this is a one off occasion or a repeated action?
3. An 86-year-old widow has three adult children. The eldest son and the daughter moved out when they started their own family years ago.

The youngest son, aged 38, remains single and lives with his mother. He occasionally works late. And when he does, he sometimes wakes his mother in order to get her to make him a meal, even though it may be 1 or 2 in the morning.

**Is there any difference if the mother is healthy and physically independent?**



4. Madam Leung, 79 years old, has had Bipolar Affective Disorder for years and needs to attend medical follow-ups regularly. Despite taking her medications as prescribed, Leung experiences bipolar attacks every now and then. Her elder son used to take care of her refuses to take his mom to her scheduled medical follow-up appointments because he claims that the regular follow-ups are not helping his mom's condition at all.
5. A 78-year-old man who has chronic arthritis lives with his elder son's family. He and the daughter-in-law are not on good terms and rarely if ever speak to each other. Whenever her husband is out for business trip, the daughter-in-law treats the old man as if he were invisible and does not even cook for him.
6. A 75-year-old woman suffers left hemiplegia after a stroke, lives with her eldest son's family. Both her eldest son and daughter-in-law need to consistently work long hours. They do not have any children. Having no extra support, the elder woman is often left at home alone, with some food left at her bedside.
7. Miu, aged 67 and her husband, Keung, aged 72, got married 42 years ago. Their marriage was entirely arranged by their parents under the old Chinese tradition. As such, they had never seen nor even known each other before the marriage. They have had no kids.

Keung left Miu 15 years ago and married another woman in Mainland China. There was no official divorce between Miu and Keung. Since then, Miu has been living alone in Hong Kong.

A couple months ago, Keung returned to Hong Kong and managed to obtain Mui's address with the help of a distant relative. When Keung

visited Miu, he forced her to have sex with him, claiming that it was her duty as his wife.

8. An elderly woman who is 88 lives with her only son, who is 52. The son has been unemployed for almost two years now and both of them are relying on Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) for financial support. The elder woman's general condition has been deteriorating lately and she has been in and out of hospital for several times in the past 4 months. Upon admission this last time, the medical team recommended to the son that it would be in his mother's best interest to be transferred to a nursing home after this hospitalization. The son, knowing that the entire amount of her CCSA would be used to pay for her nursing home fee, refused to follow the medical team's recommendation.
9. A 45-year-old man is a hawker who sells bedding to pedestrians. His business has never been good. His mother, 76-year-old, regularly attends a nearby day centre for elderly people. The son makes his elderly mother carry the heavy bedding and to sell them in the centre.
10. A widow, aged 77, lives with her adult son's family. The daughter-in-law is a fulltime housewife, who takes care of the family, including their only baby girl, who is 4 years old. When her husband was not at home, the daughter-in-law asked her mother-in-law to provide financial support to the family by giving them her monthly pension. When the mother in law refused, the daughter-in-law no longer allowed the grandson to play with her grandmother.
11. A 79-year-old woman lives with her son's family. The son needs to work more than 14 hours daily in a Chinese restaurant. The daughter-in-law is a fulltime housewife who has to take care of her two children (8 months old and 3 years old respectively). The elderly woman is physically independent and socially active. She often talks with friends using a home telephone. She and her daughter-in-law do not like each other a lot. Now, whenever there is a caller asking the daughter-in-law for her mother-in-law

on the phone, she simply replies that “there is no such person here!” and hangs up.

12. A 71-year-old man suffers Parkinson’s disease and his movement can be jerky at times. This is more obvious when he feeds himself, and as a result, his dining table is often quite messy. His wife refuses to dine with him, protesting that it is too disgusting to eat together. Therefore, the elderly man is forced to eat alone since the wife gives and feeds him his meal only after she finishes her first.

## **Appendix 2: Revised Vignettes on Elder Abuse Scenarios**

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1. Mr. and Mrs. Li are now 89 and 88 years old respectively. Both are lucid and capable of making decisions for their simple daily living. They have four children; all are married and have their own home. Mr. & Mrs. Li live by themselves with a live-in Pilipino domestic helper. Mrs. Li has type II diabetes and hypertension. Although she can walk with minor assistance for a short distance, she gets faint easily. Mr. Li is physically stronger. He can walk independently though he gets tired easily and lately his gait has been getting a bit unsteady. Their four children decided to keep their parents in doors by making the domestic helper a gatekeeper at all times!
2. Mr. Chiang, ages 82, lives with his only son, Ming, aged 49 and single, in a public estate flat which is barely 80 feet. Their beds are located next to each other. Chiang has chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and two weeks ago, he started to experience mild respiratory distress. In addition, he has been coughing periodically at nights. Ming is a taxi driver and needs to work from 0700 till 1900 on a daily basis. Ming's sleep has lately been disturbed by his father's cough. One night, Ming just could not take it anymore, and thus after he had been woken up by his coughing once more in the middle of the night, he shook her father vigorously. Is there any difference if this is a one off occasion or a repeated action?
3. An 86-year-old widow has three adult children. The eldest son and the daughter moved out when they started their own family years ago. The youngest son, aged 38, remains single and lives with his mother. He occasionally works late. And when he does, he sometimes wakes his mother in order to get her to make him a meal, even though it may be 1 or 2 in the morning.  
**Is there any difference if the mother is healthy and physically independent?**
4. Madam Leung, 79 years old, has had Bipolar Affective Disorder for years and needs to attend medical follow-ups regularly. Despite taking her medications as prescribed, Leung experiences bipolar attacks every now and then. Her elder son used to take care of her refuses to take his mom to her scheduled medical follow-up appointments because he claims that the regular follow-ups are not helping his mom's condition at all.
5. A 78-year-old man who has chronic arthritis lives with his elder son's family. He and the daughter-in-law are not on good terms and rarely if ever speak to each other. Whenever her husband is out for business trip,

the daughter-in-law treats the old man as if he were invisible and does not even cook for him.

6. A 75-year-old woman suffers left hemiplegia after a stroke, lives with her eldest son's family. Both her eldest son and daughter-in-law need to consistently work long hours. They do not have any children. Having no extra support, the elder woman is often left at home alone, with some food left at her bedside.
7. Miu, aged 67 and her husband, Keung, aged 72, got married 42 years ago. Their marriage was entirely arranged by their parents under the old Chinese tradition. As such, they had never seen nor even known each other before the marriage. They have had no kids. Keung left Miu 15 years ago and married another woman in Mainland China. There was no official divorce between Miu and Keung. Since then, Miu has been living alone in Hong Kong. A couple months ago, Keung returned to Hong Kong and managed to obtain Mui's address with the help of a distant relative. When Keung visited Miu, he forced her to have sex with him, claiming that it was her duty as his wife.
8. An elderly woman who is 88 lives with her only son, who is 52. The son has been unemployed for almost two years now and both of them are relying on Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) for financial support. The elder woman's general condition has been deteriorating lately and she has been in and out of hospital for several times in the past 4 months. Upon admission this last time, the medical team recommended to the son that it would be in his mother's best interest to be transferred to a nursing home after this hospitalization. The son, knowing that the entire amount of her CCSA would be used to pay for her nursing home fee, refused to follow the medical team's recommendation.
9. A 45-year-old man is a hawker who sells bedding to pedestrians. His business has never been good. His mother, 76-year-old, regularly attends a nearby day centre for elderly people. The son makes his elderly mother carry the heavy bedding and to sell them in the centre.
10. A widow, aged 77, lives with her adult son's family. The daughter-in-law is a fulltime housewife, who takes care of the family, including their only baby girl, who is 4 years old. When her husband was not at home, the daughter-in-law asked her mother-in-law to provide financial support to the family by giving them her monthly pension. When the mother in law

refused, the daughter-in-law no longer allowed the grandson to play with her grandmother.

11. A 79-year-old woman lives with her son's family. The son needs to work more than 14 hours daily in a Chinese restaurant. The daughter-in-law is a fulltime housewife who has to take care of her two children (8 months old and 3 years old respectively). The elderly woman is physically independent and socially active. She often talks with friends using a home telephone. She and her daughter-in-law do not like each other a lot. Now, whenever there is a caller asking the daughter-in-law for her mother-in-law on the phone, she simply replies that "there is no such person here!" and hangs up.
12. A 71-year-old man suffers Parkinson's disease and his movement can be jerky at times. This is more obvious when he feeds himself, and as a result, his dining table is often quite messy. His wife refuses to dine with him, protesting that it is too disgusting to eat together. Therefore, the elderly man is forced to eat alone since the wife feed him his meal only after she finishes her first.
13. Ah Tao and Ah Lin are sisters, aged 78 and 75 years old respective. They used to work as domestic helpers when they were young, and had never got married. Now they live together in a small public estate flat. Ah Tao's hearing has been impaired and tends to turn on the television to a very loud volume. One night, Ah Lin is woken up by the television and she hits her sister with a rod ...

1. How are you today? Can you tell me something about your daily activities?
2. Have you heard of the elder abuse? Where and how did you come across this term?
3. Please can you try to explain to me with some examples you consider are of typical elder abuse situations?  
Do you think there is elder abuse in the case? Why?
  - a. If you were the older person in the story, what would you do (to seek help or not?) Why?
4. Who may be involved in the abuse of older people?
5. What do you think should be done to prevent abuse from occurring?
6. What do you think should be done for people who experienced abuse?

*To wrap up an interview, the followings were used:*

1. Thank you very much for your time and help. I appreciate the information
2. Your information will be beneficial or Your opinions are valuable
3. Do you need any clarification?
4. Please be reminded that all the information you just told me is completely confidential
5. This is my contact telephone number you can call to verify the survey. If you have concern about any parts of the study, you can call the following number ...

1. How are you today? Can you tell me something about your daily activities?
2. Have you heard of the elder abuse? Where and how did you come across this term?
3. What do you understand by the term of elder abuse?
4. Have you witnessed any incident which you think / suspect it elder abuse?
5. Please can you try to explain to me with some examples you consider are of typical elder abuse situations?  
[If participant cannot think of one at the time] Use 3-5 scenarios to explore further:
  - a. Do you think there is elder abuse in the case? Why?
  - b. Have you experienced similar situations before? If not, imagine if you were the older person in the story, what would you do (to seek help or not?) Why?
6. Who do you think may abuse older people?
7. What do you think should be done to prevent abuse from occurring?
8. What do you think should be done for people who experience abuse?
9. Apart from the above, do you have anything related to elder abuse that you wish to share with me please?

*To wrap up an interview, the followings were used:*

1. Thank you very much for your time and help. I appreciate the information
2. Your information will be beneficial or Your opinions are valuable
3. Do you need any clarification?
4. Please be reminded that all the information you just told me is completely confidential
5. This is my contact telephone number you can call to verify the survey. If you have concern about any parts of the study, you can call the following number ...



**Appendix 5: Demographic Data Sheet (for older participants)**

---

**Demographic Data Sheet (older people)    Date: \_\_\_\_\_**

Name:	
Age:	_____ years old
Sex:	<input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Male
Marital Status:	<input type="checkbox"/> Single <input type="checkbox"/> Married <input type="checkbox"/> Widowed <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced
Educational Level:	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Primary (P.____) <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary (F.____) <input type="checkbox"/> Tertiary or above ( <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor <input type="checkbox"/> Master <input type="checkbox"/> PhD)
Employment Status:	<input type="checkbox"/> Employed <input type="checkbox"/> Unemployed <input type="checkbox"/> Retired
Occupation:	
Monthly Income:	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than HK\$1000 <input type="checkbox"/> HK\$1000-3000 <input type="checkbox"/> HK\$3000-5000 <input type="checkbox"/> More than HK\$5000
Living Arrangement:	<input type="checkbox"/> Lives alone <input type="checkbox"/> Lives with spouse only <input type="checkbox"/> Lives with children only <input type="checkbox"/> Lives with spouse and children <input type="checkbox"/> Lives with friend / relative(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Lives in Institution
Offspring:	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes ( _____ daughter(s) ; _____ son(s))
Other close relatives:	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes ( _____ )
Any Religious Belief?	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes ( <input type="checkbox"/> Catholic <input type="checkbox"/> Christianity <input type="checkbox"/> Buddhism <input type="checkbox"/> Others _____)
Any elder abuse experiences?	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/> Yes → Did you ever seek for help? <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes ( see interview content)
Contact No. (optional)	

**Appendix 6: Demographic Data Sheet (for professional participants)**

**Demographic Data Sheet (Professionals)      Date: \_\_\_\_\_**

Name:	
Age:	_____ years old
Contact No. (optional)	
Sex:	<input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Male
Marital Status:	<input type="checkbox"/> Single <input type="checkbox"/> Married <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced <input type="checkbox"/> Widowed
Educational Level:	<input type="checkbox"/> Secondary (F._____) <input type="checkbox"/> Tertiary or above <input type="checkbox"/> Diploma <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor <input type="checkbox"/> Master <input type="checkbox"/> MPhil / Doctorial <input type="checkbox"/> PhD
Employment Status:	<input type="checkbox"/> Full-time <input type="checkbox"/> Part-time Working in this field for _____ years.
Occupation:	
Workplace Nature / Region:	
Offspring:	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (_____ daughter(s) ; _____ son(s))
Any Religious Belief?	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes ( <input type="checkbox"/> Catholic; <input type="checkbox"/> Christianity; <input type="checkbox"/> Buddhism; Others _____)

## **Appendix 7: Research Information Sheet (English Version)**

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### ***Study Title: Perceptions of Elder Abuse and Help-Seeking Behaviours Among Community-Dwelling Older Chinese People Living in Hong Kong and Healthcare Professionals: a Constructivist Grounded Theory Study***

You are cordially being invited to participate in a study conducted by Shirley Ka Lai LO, who is a part-time MPhil/PhD student in University of Sheffield under the supervision of Reader Bridget PENHALE and Professor Mike NOLAN. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand the purpose and nature of this study. Please **take time to read** the following paragraphs and ask me if you would like more information. Thank you for reading this.

The aim of this study is to identify what constitute to elder mistreatment from the viewpoints of Hong Kong older Chinese people, and to exam their relevant help-seeking behaviours in face of elder abuse situations. The information generated from this research will help to contribute to the body of knowledge on the older people's perception of elder mistreatment and their help-seeking preferences, and to explore the implications for future development of effective and cultural sensitive programme against elder mistreatment in Hong Kong.

We would like to invite you to take part in this research by sharing your opinions on the discussion of elder mistreatment. The interview will take about 45 minutes to complete. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you have every right to withdraw at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way, and you do not need to give a reason. If during the discussion, you find it discomfort or emotionally distressed in continuing the sharing of opinions with the interviewer, you have every right to stop or to postpone the discussion. The interview will be audiotaped with your informed consent. All identifying information will be locked to which only the researcher has access. And all the data will be kept for no longer than necessary as far as this study is concerned. Whilst there may not have immediate benefits for the participants, it is hope that this work will help to construct useful data for the better understanding of the concept of elder mistreatment among local older Chinese people and the formulation of effective programme against this social problem.

If you agree to participate, please sign the attached informed consent form to initiate the interview. All information collected in this study related to you will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications.

If you have any complaints about the conduct of this research, please contact Ms. Kath Lui, Secretary of the Human Subjects Ethics Sub-Committee of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University in person or in writing (c/o Research Office of the University).

If you have any questions or would like to receive further information about the research project, please contact Ms. LO, at the School of Nursing at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, FG 510; telephone: (852) 2766 5588 or email: [Shirley.Lo@polyu.edu.hk](mailto:Shirley.Lo@polyu.edu.hk)

**Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.**



THE HONG KONG  
POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY  
香港理工大學

### 有關資料

研究項目標題: 香港社區老年人對虐老的看法及其求助的行為態度

本人盧嘉麗 (香港大學護理學院講師) 誠邀閣下參與一項有關香港社區老年人對虐老的看法及其求助的行為態度的研究。

這項研究的目的是收集閣下對虐老的看法及其求助的行為態度的意見, 用以更進一步了解本港長者在這方面的具體意見。所得的寶貴資料, 將有助於日後有關人員在虐老這社會問題上做更好的工作。

研究中可能涉及到焦點小組討論個人面議。調查當中的內容包括個人的基本資料 (例如年齡、性別、居住地區等)、健康狀況、社交狀況、活動能力、對虐老問題的看法以至對現行的援助 (被虐長者) 的意見等。面議約需 45- 75 分鐘, 過程內容會被錄音, 以方便資料記錄及分析。

這項研究或會引起一些參與人仕情緒波動, 研究人員將與以基本開導服務及或在參與者同意下, 轉介有關人員 (例如社工、社區護士、志願團體) 協助。

有關閣下的個人資料均會保密, 一切資料只供研究之用。

閣下參與後有權隨時退出研究而不需作任何解釋, 並且不會受到任何對閣下不正常的代遇或責任追究。

如果閣下有任何對這項研究的不滿, 可透過親身或以書面形式聯絡香港理工大學人事倫理委員秘書 (地址: 香港理工大學人力資源辦公室 M 1303 室轉交)。

若閣下想獲得更多有關這項研究的資料, 可以與盧嘉麗 (電話 2766 5588) 聯絡。

多謝閣下參加是項研究。

研究人員: 盧嘉麗

2011 年 3 月 2 日



參與研究同意書

研究項目標題: 香港社區老年人對虐老的看法及其求助的行為態度

本人\_\_\_\_\_同意參與由盧嘉麗女仕開展的上述研究。

本人知悉此研究所得的資料可能被用作日後的研究及發表, 但本人的私隱權利將得以保留, 即本人的個人資料不會被公開。

研究人員已向本人清楚解釋列在附資料上的研究程序, 本人明瞭當中涉及的利益及風險; 本人自願參與研究項目。

本人知悉本人有權就程序的任何部分提出疑問, 並有權隨時退出而不受任何懲處。

參與者姓名: \_\_\_\_\_

參與者簽署: \_\_\_\_\_

研究人員姓名: \_\_\_\_\_

研究人員簽署: \_\_\_\_\_

日期: \_\_\_\_\_

**CONSENT FORM FOR PROFESSIONALS****同意書****Title of Project: Perceptions of Elder Abuse and Help-Seeking Behaviours Among Community-Dwelling Older Chinese People Living in Hong Kong and Healthcare Professionals: a Constructivist Grounded Theory Study**

Name of Researchers: Shirley K. LO, MPhil/PhD Student  
 Mike Nolan, Professor of Gerontological Nursing  
 Bridget Penhale, Reader in Gerontology

**Please initial all****boxes**

1. I confirm that I understand the information I have been given about the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.  
 我明白所提供的資料及應有的提問機會。
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without my legal rights being affected. If this occurs, any data or recording collected from me will not be included in the research unless I wish it to be.  
 我明白這次的訪問完全是基於我個人的自由意願，並可在任何時間終止而不需提出任何理由，此訪問所提供的資料只能在我同意下才可用於研究及發表。
3. I understand that all discussion taking place in the interview is confidential and that the information generated will be kept according to the 1998 Data Protection Act guidelines\*.  
 我知道這次訪問的內容會被英國一九九八年的於閱律法的保密條例所保障。
4. I agree that the discussion can be recorded and transcribed (typed up) for the purposes of the analysis and used in anonymous reports/publications.  
 我同意此次的討論可錄音、文字記錄以作不記名的分析及發表之用。
5. I agree to take part in the above study.  
 我同意參予此項研究。

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Name of Individual

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Researcher taking consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature

Please keep one copy of this form and return the additional copy to a member of the research team – thank you.

\* Details regarding Data Protection act (1998) can be found at:

[www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTSacts1998/19980029.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTSacts1998/19980029.htm)

## Appendix 11: Diagrammatic Representation of the Findings from the Process of Data Collection and Analysis

Phases	Research questions	Data source	Sampling and sampling objectives	Coding and coding objectives	Findings
<p><b>I</b></p> <p>Oct 2011 ↓ Apr 2012</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What does 'elder abuse' mean to the participants?</li> <li>▪ What constitute elder abuse?</li> <li>▪ What are their responses to abusive situations?</li> </ul> <p>* <u>Vignettes</u> used as needed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Two pilot focus groups (seniors and LTC team)</li> <li>▪ Interviews</li> <li>▪ Document review / analysis</li> </ul>	<p><b>Open sampling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To discover as many relevant categories (properties and dimensions) as possible</li> </ul>	<p><b>Initial coding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Line-by-line coding: stay close to the data, to name, label and categorize phenomenon</li> <li>▪ Paying attention to the language of participants</li> <li>▪ Using gerunds as much as possible – focusing on actions, trying to see what is happening</li> <li>▪ To develop categories basing on their properties and dimensions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mistreating / being mean to older persons</li> <li>▪ Neglecting or ignoring need / request of help to meet elders' basic needs</li> <li>▪ Providing unacceptable care to seniors</li> <li>▪ Disavowing financial support / deceiving elders' property</li> <li>▪ Lacking of respects / obedience</li> <li>▪ Upsetting family hierarchy &amp; harmony – imbalance of power and control</li> <li>▪ <b>Unfilially</b> – from concepts to conducts</li> <li>▪ Physical abuse: slapping, hitting, pushing...</li> <li>▪ <i>Negative/deviant case</i>: no hitting = no abuse</li> <li>▪ Depriving elders' autonomy about their own ADLs (coercing into Old Age Home)</li> <li>▪ <b>Being excluded</b> from family life</li> <li>▪ Segregating elders from social contacts</li> <li>▪ Abandoning seniors – unattended</li> <li>▪ <b>Elder-to-elder</b> cannot be elder abuse?</li> <li>▪ Puzzling: Spousal abuse? Sexual abuse?</li> <li>▪ Being treated as '<i>invisible</i>'</li> <li>▪ Blaming victims</li> <li>▪ Discrepancy in intergenerational values / expectations</li> </ul>
<p><b>II</b></p> <p>May 2012 ↓ Oct 2012</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What is the influence of traditional culture (filial piety) in the understanding of elder abuse in the local context?</li> <li>▪ How <i>unfilial it takes</i> to be elder abuse?</li> <li>▪ <u>Vignettes</u> used as needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Focus groups (Prof: CNS and SW)</li> <li>▪ Interviews with older participants and professionals</li> <li>▪ Documents</li> </ul>	<p><b>Relational, theoretical sampling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Using snowballing and theoretical sampling to uncover as many relevant categories as possible</li> <li>▪ To expand the findings of difference at dimensional levels</li> <li>▪ To maximize variables</li> </ul>	<p><b>Initial &amp; Focused coding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Finding variations</li> <li>▪ Compare data with data, within and across cases</li> <li>▪ Theoretical coding: to relate categories and subcategories</li> <li>▪ Check the data against the codes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maintaining / preserving family order</li> <li>▪ Assessing the degree of <i>unfilial</i> conduct</li> <li>▪ Excluding elders from society or policy-making (e.g. 'signing off' elderly parents-衰仔紙)</li> <li>▪ Blaming: daughters-in-law as scapegoat?</li> <li>▪ Calculating the changing environment and family relationships in light of increasing dependency</li> <li>▪ <b>Excusing</b> / empathizing - 'busy work life'</li> <li>▪ Realizing the <b>changing</b> social values</li> <li>▪ Differentiating inadequate care from abuse</li> <li>▪ Eroding of filial piety as the root of EA</li> <li>▪ Seeing children as main abuser</li> <li>▪ Distant - not staying connected as a family</li> </ul>
<p><b>III</b></p> <p>Nov 2012 ↓ Dec 2012</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To what extend the <i>changing nature of social context and filial attitudes</i> influence their perceptions?</li> <li>▪ Why the response (to act / not to act?)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interviews of older people &amp; professionals</li> <li>▪ Documents</li> </ul>	<p><b>Theoretical sampling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To identify and validate relationships among and between categories</li> <li>▪ Check how codes or categories hold up against previous data</li> </ul>	<p><b>Focused coding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> To look for variation and process</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Continue to compare data, categories and concepts</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> To formulate directive, conceptual codes</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> To develop the concepts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Old-husband-young-wife</b>: emerging form of financial abuse</li> <li>▪ Inquiring on the '<b>intent</b>' of abuser</li> <li>▪ <b>Explaining</b>: work is too harsh, limited living environment, changing societal value</li> <li>▪ Weighing the consequences/endpoints</li> <li>▪ Querying – who is abusing whom?</li> <li>▪ Avoiding direct conflicts – harmony as priority; fear the loss of family;</li> <li>▪ Denying or unaware of the problem?</li> <li>▪ Pondering whom to rely on – <b>enduring</b></li> <li>▪ Exploring (or lack of) resources – <b>enduring</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Adjusting expectations</b> in face of changing world views: <b>obligations versus ability</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>IV</b></p> <p>July 2013 ↓ Oct 2014</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What exactly do we mean by these responses and how are they related?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interviews of seniors and professionals</li> <li>▪ Focus group with older participants</li> </ul>	<p><b>Theoretical sampling (discriminate)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To fill in the gaps of categories identified</li> <li>▪ To fully verify the story-line and their relationships</li> </ul>	<p><b>Focused coding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To complete the puzzles in any category that need further development</li> <li>▪ To integrate the categories to construct a substantive theory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fearing of loss / worsening</li> <li>▪ <b>Tiping point</b>: enough is enough</li> <li>▪ Judging the 'intent' versus 'outcome'</li> <li>▪ Struggling: 'Face' versus 'fate'</li> <li>▪ <b>Justifying enduring</b> approach</li> <li>▪ <b>Reframing expectation</b></li> </ul>





## **Appendix 13: Useful Information Sheet for Older Participants**

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Thank you again for taking part in this research study and for sharing your experiences with us. If you would like any additional information about this study please contact Shirley LO (852-2766 5588 or [hsslo@inet.polyu.edu.hk](mailto:hsslo@inet.polyu.edu.hk)). Address: School of Nursing, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Hong Kong.

感謝您的參與和分享。若你需要索取關於此研究的更多資料，請聯絡盧嘉麗女仕：2766-5588 或電郵 [hsslo@polyu.edu.hk](mailto:hsslo@polyu.edu.hk)。郵寄：九龍紅磡理工大學護理系

### **Helpful telephone numbers and websites**

Below is a list of key organisations that provide information and support for people who have experienced domestic abuse. Please make sure to access to the numbers or websites in a safe environment.

以下列出一些有用的電話和網站：

**Social Welfare Department:** (+852 2343 2255 / <http://www.swd.gov.hk/>)

Free 24-hour domestic violence helpline.

社會福利署：(2343 2255, 電郵 <http://www.swd.gov.hk>) – 24 小時家庭暴力熱線

**Caritas Family Crisis Support Centre:** (852 18288 / <http://fcsc.caritas.org.hk/>)

A non-government organization provides services including crisis counselling, Buffer retreat accommodation, Community support groups.

明愛向晴軒：18288, 電郵 <http://fcsc.caritas.org.hk/>

**Harmony House:** (Woman Hotline: 852 2522 0434; Man Hotline: 2295 1386 / <http://www.harmonyhousehk.org/>)

A non-profit organization funded by Jockey Club. Its Domestic Violence Prevention Centre was established in 2006, providing services such as professional training and community awareness programmes, community resources against domestic violence, drop-in service, and batterers/perpetrators intervention programmes.

和諧之家：婦女中心 2522 0434; 男性中心 2295 1386; 電郵 <http://www.harmonyhousehk.org/>

**Tung Wah Group of Hospitals:** (85218281 / <http://www.tungwahcsd.org/chi/elderly/es.php>)

**Provides 24-hours hotline. It also has elderly day centres, counselling and supportive services.**

東華三院：18281, <http://www.tungwahcsd.org/chi/elderly/es.php> - 24 小時輔導服務

**The Samaritans Hong Kong:** (852 2896 0000 / <http://samaritans.org.hk/index.php>)

Provides 24-hour confidential emotional support to anyone experiencing feelings of distress.

香港撒瑪利亞會: 2896 0000 / <http://samaritans.org.hk/index.php>

**Hong Kong Christian Service: Project on Elder Abuse Reconciliation Service:**  
(852 3586 9337 / [http://www.hkcs.org/archives/earp/earp\\_e.htm](http://www.hkcs.org/archives/earp/earp_e.htm))

Free helpline for anyone experiencing elder abuse problems. Provides advice and information on housing, legal and financial issues for victims of domestic violence. Provides direct reconciliation service to handle disputes in suspected/established elder abuse cases.

香港基督教服務: 虐老復康服務 - 3586 9337 /  
[http://www.hkcs.org/archives/earp/earp\\_e.htm](http://www.hkcs.org/archives/earp/earp_e.htm)

**Appendix 14: List of Publications Arising from This Study**

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- Lo, S.K.L., Nolan, M., and Penhale, B. (2017). *Advancing Policy and Practice in Elder Abuse: Messages from Stakeholders in Hong Kong*. Conference proceeding in IAGG, July 23-27, 2017, California, USA.
- Lo, S.K.L., Nolan, M., and Penhale, B. (2015). *Hong Kong Chinese Older People's Perceptions of and Responses to Elder Abuse in the Context of Changing Family and Intergenerational Relations*. Oral presentation in the 68th Gerontological Society of America Annual Scientific Meeting, Nov 18-22, 2015. Orlando, FL., USA.
- Lo, S., Nolan, M., and Penhale, B. (2015) Elder Abuse: Older People's and Professionals' Perspectives on its Meaning in Hong Kong. Oral presentation in the 18th EAFONS: Integrating Sciences and Humanities in Doctoral Nursing Education, February 5-6, Taipei.
- Lo, S.K.L., Nolan, M. & Penhale, B. (2014). *Perceived effectiveness of elder abuse interventions: a qualitative study among community-dwelling older people in Hong Kong*. Oral presentation in Hong Kong College of Gerontology Nursing 8th Scientific Meeting, HKSAR, May 31<sup>st</sup> 2014.
- Lo, S., Nolan, M. & Penhale, B. (2013). *What do the perceptions of community-dwelling Hong Kong older Chinese teach us about their understanding of elder abuse?* Oral presentation in the 16th East Asian Forum of Nursing Scholars (EAFONS) – Developing International Networking for Nursing Research. February 21-22, 2013, Bangkok, Thailand.
- Lo, S. (2011). *A Review of Older People's Perceptions on Elder Abuse*. Poster presentation in 39th BGS 2011, Plymouth, the UK.